Fanart and Family

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Fanart and Family

by willowmellontree

Summary

One minute, Jimmy was commenting on a piece of fanart and the next, he was flirting with the guy on the other end of the account.

Between auditioning for the new series of Hotguys TV show and bittersweet childhood memories with his family, finding love on the internet seems to be a walk in the park...

(Basically, Ranchers meet online, Jimmy auditions for a part in Hotguy's tv show and Jimmy has some childhood trauma and found family.)

The Email

It was late evening as Jimmy scrolled through social media on his phone. There wasn't anything else to do that night. It was too late to start something new like starting a TV show or watching a film, so instead, he laid in bed. He could hear the soft hum of his fan which sat on the bedside table. It sent a cool breeze over his way that cut though the stuffy humid air that lingered in his room. The windows were open a crack too. Jimmy's room brightened and dimmed with warm and cool lights as cars past by on the road outside, though Jimmy didn't notice, his focus on his screen.

Twitter was behaving the same as usual. Arguments, fanart, arguments about fanart. The normal stuff.

Jimmy ran a fan account for one of his brother's best friends, who was an Actor in a popular TV series currently. He played Hot Guy, a superhero. Grian had told Jimmy to apply, and he had done. The Audition processes had gone through after a long job of getting a show reel set up and sending it to the company. Now he just had to wait for a reply.

He yawned and rubbed his face, thinking about putting his phone down and going to sleep, but that's when he stumbled on some fan art. "Oh that's so cool." It was a piece of art from a game Jimmy liked called 'Decked out'. A game where you went into the dungeons and collected artifacts to get cards that could help you with future game play. The Game was addicting, and this fan art was amazing.

It was of the dungeon master. Icy blue hair, eyes the same and a long black cloak with a hood. The picture used blues and purples and blacks and was like the dungeon master had set everything on fire. Blue fire.

Jimmy pulled up the comment section to see what people had said.

Not a single comment.

Seeing that, Jimmy liked the post and wrote his own comment.

-

SolidarityCanary

Thats so cool!!! I love the colours!!

-

Jimmy smiled and put his phone down, ready to go to sleep.

He slept peacefully.

-

The next morning a comment was left, replying to Jimmy's from that night. From the creator of the fan art itself.

-

TekVariety

Thanks.

-

Though the message was short, in reality, the man behind the account smiled. It was rare he got comments.

-

The next morning, Jimmy opened his phone and liked the reply to his comment without a second thought. He moved to his other account, seeing there was a new Hot guy Poster out. Jimmy liked the original post and went to find the source of the poster. Screen shotting it and putting it on his own account.

-

TheHotGuyFanAccount

Look at this amazing poster for the new season!! Isn't it cool!

-

Just to make it known, Jimmy went onto his other account and quote tweeted it.

-

SolidarityCanary

Check out Hot Guy fan account for daily news!

-

Jimmy sighed and figured he should get something done that day. He got up and stretched, opening his curtains and looking out to see what was going on outside. Nothing.

It was quiet. Too quiet for Jimmy's tastes. He went to his phone and put on some Bowie. Two un-skippable ads came on and he groaned. "I swear I will throw you out of the window!"

By the time he got downstairs, the ads had finished, so he was able to listen to Bowie in peace for a bit. A few notifications pinged but he left it be, just wanting to enjoy breakfast with Bowie.

He made himself some eggs and made small dance moves along to the beat of the music as he did. The morning sun beamed into the room, painting his furniture with a soft glow. The sun brightened his spirits. He felt well rested too.

More ads came on and Jimmy couldn't be bothered to listen to another Domino's Pizza advert, so he went off YouTube and took a look at his notifications. A few likes on his posts, a few comments and reposts. A message from his sister and step sister, and an email from the audition people.

Wait.

Jimmy turned red with nerves and pressed on the notification straight away. He read the Email, eyes skimming over the screen like a stream roller. A grin formed on his face. Jimmy screen shotted the email and went to his messages to the family group chat.

-

Timmy- Look!!! I Got through to the next audition process!!!

Martyn- Well done Tim!

Pearl- 😊 Well done Jimmy 😊

-

Jimmy grinned and went through his other notifications, liking the comments as he went down. To calm down from the excitement, he sat at his table and scrolled through twitter again, mostly to look at fanart. Another popped up from that account from yesterday. Again, from Decked Out.

Must be a super fan or something.

This one was of deep frost citadel. Dark and billowing, set in the ice and snow. There was no text, just the art.

-

SolidarityCanary

My dude this is Awesome!

-

Jimmy, now curious went to explore this person's account and was not disappointed. There was art. In each one, Jimmy could see how the artist had grown. Oh, they were good. Some tweets were retweets, and the older ones seemed to include things about game design. Stuff about code. Replies to people with problems with their computers.

Oh, so this person was computer clever.

Without much decision, Jimmy followed the account. It was good art, what else is he supposed to do?

Almost immediately, Jimmy got a follow back by ‘TekVariety.’ Which wasn’t unusual to Jimmy. They both just so happened to be online at the same time.

-

Eventually, Jimmy went off Twitter and flicked back to the email. It gave a time and place; next week. He blinked as he read over it again and again, not wanting to miss any details.

The instructions were simple.

Be at the audition place, some place in London, at ten in the morning. Saturday 9th August 2025. Beforehand, learn a duologue from the script itself. Wear neutral clothes and bring food and water in case the auditions run over time. Ten auditionees will be called back for the final audition process.

Jimmy took a breath and let it out, putting his phone on the table. “Right um.” He thought about what he wanted to do next. “I might go to dad's.” Jimmy picked his phone up and texted his sister Gem.

Jimmy: Meet me at dads?

Gem: Yeah. Are you ok?

Jimmy: Perfect. Just want to hang out :)

Gem: Alright, I’ll meet you there.

-

Jimmy put his trainers on, pocketed his phone and keys and left his house. He took a breath of fresh air, and it filled his lungs. It was a cool day for the beginning of August, but it didn’t matter too much. He took a walk down to the bus stop and waited a few minutes for the next bus. They always came quarter past the hour down to Impulse’s house.

OCTOBER 2008

Jimmy tightly held onto his teddy, like he was worried he would drop and lose it. It was dark, but it didn’t mean it was nighttime just yet. Martyn had just given them dinner. Spaghetti hoops from the cupboard and one of Jimmy’s favorites.

Blue lights flashed through the living room window and there was a strange man with a funny hat and a bright jacket that reflected the lights around. A woman came in, clipboard in hand. Her hair was brown and in a bun. She was talking to Martyn.

Jimmy looked around for his sister and other brother. Both just a few years older than him. Twins. Grian was older than Pearl by a few minutes and Jimmy knew that because G loved to tell everyone. They were on the sofa.

Oh! Jimmy knew who the strange people were! They were the police. That worried the small boy. “Are we going to be put in prison?”

Jimmy's voice came out, small and shaky.

The woman. She looked kind, smiled at him and knelt to his level. Jimmy was small for a six-year-old. "Why do you think that?"

"Mummy said we would." He held his teddy tight. "If we told that she was on holiday."

The woman's eyes softened more. She put a gentle hand on his shoulder. "You're not in trouble." She paused, trying to remember his name. "Jimmy, right?"

Jimmy nodded.

"What's your teddy called?" The nice lady asked. Her badge read Lauren, though Jimmy couldn't read very well yet.

Jimmy looked for his older siblings to make sure they weren't being taken away. "Norman."

The woman followed his gaze. "PC Barnaby is just having a little chat with Martyn. Don't worry, he's not in trouble either."

Jimmy didn't believe a word until Martyn turned his head to look at him. Martyn smiled, though it didn't reach his eyes. Luckily, Jimmy wasn't old enough to understand.

"We're going to try and find a place for all four of you to stay the night, so you'll be safe with a grown up." She told him.

Martyn came over. "No, you can't split us up."

The woman sighed. She knew what the system was like, having seen it all. "I'll try my best to find you all a place together. If I can't, I'll make sure you can all stay in contact."

Jimmy didn't like the sound of being split up. He went to sit on the sofa next to Pearl. The twins hadn't spoken at all. Jimmy leant into his sister and Pearl put her arm around him. She was holding on tight to Grian's hand.

Martyn wasn't going to let up. "Look, I'm old enough to look after them myself. Who told on us? Was it Mrs. Cox? I knew she was a nosy bat."

She kept her tone calm. "How old are you?"

“Sixteen.” Martyn said, still defensive.

Jimmy knew he should’ve kept quiet. “No, your birthday is in November. It’s only October.”

Martyn went still. “No, Timmy’s too young to know his months. Got them mixed up. It’s ok, I’m old enough.”

The woman... Jimmy didn’t know her name... sat down in an armchair and looked at Martyn. The younger three watched. “It’s a two-bedroom house. How's the sleeping arraignments?”

Martyn stumbled at the change. “Pearl sleeps in mums' room and I sleep in the other room with the boys. Or if Mum is here, then I take the sofa. I don’t want to have to make Pearl sleep on the sofa. It’s not the comfiest thing in the world.”

She nodded. “How often is your mum here?”

“Well, she’s.” Martyn stopped, opening his mouth a few times, but he didn’t know how to start again.

The woman stood up. “Alright, so what I’m going to do is ring up a few people outside to see if someone can take you in for the night. Tomorrow, if you’re up to it, we can talk a little more about this. I still want you to feel as involved as you want to be with your siblings. The last thing I want to do is take that away from you.”

Martyn hesitated, but gave in. “Ok. Just, please don’t separate us.”

Lauren reassured Martyn with a smile and stepped outside.

PC Barnaby cleared his throat. “It might be best to pack a bag for you four son.”

Martyn nodded. “Ok. Um, come on you three. Pack enough for a sleepover I guess?”

The three slid off the sofa.

“We’re being taken away?” Grian asked, though it was more of a statement.

They went up the stairs. Pearl took Jimmy’s hand, and they went up together.

“Seems so.” Martyn said. He opened their bedroom door and went to

the wardrobe. “Bring your school backpacks. We can fill them up.”

“We’ll come back, won’t we?” Pearl asked. She went to get her Cinderella backpack.

Martyn got his and Jimmy’s. “I wouldn’t count on it. Bring anything you can’t live without. Everything else can be replaced.”

Grian immediately went to his bed and reached over to grab Professor Beak. The only thing he couldn’t live without.

Pearl did the same to Tilly. Her little stuff dog.

Martyn got some clothes out of the cupboard. “Pajamas and clothes to wear tomorrow will do. We probably don’t have much time.”

Jimmy sat on his bed. He didn’t want to do. He wanted to stay here.

“Timmy, come on. What do you want to bring?” Martyn put some toy story pajamas in his brother’s back. “Are you bringing woody and Norman?”

“Don’t wanna go.” Jimmy muttered.

Martyn paused. Everything had gone so fast. An hour ago, they had been eating spaghetti hoops and listening to Brittany spears. Now, they were getting ready to go. That was if anyone wanted them. Martyn put his finished bag down and came over. He lifted his baby brother and sat him on his lap. “Timmy, I’m not going to leave you. Or you Grian, or Pearl.”

Jimmy hugged him close and sniffed. “Is mummy coming back?”

Did he lie? “No.” Martyn said truthfully.

Pearl and Grian came over and joined the hug.

“It was nicer with just us anyway.” Grian said.

Pearl nodded. “Yeah. More fun.”

Jimmy thought about it. They were right. They did have more fun when their mother wasn’t there.

There was a knock on the door and Lauren came in. She smiled sadly seeing the four of them hugging each other. “I found a place for all of you. I can take you now if you’re ready to go.”

Martyn nodded. “Got everything?” He asked his siblings.

They nodded.

All Jimmy cared about bringing was Norman and Woody, so Martyn carried his bag down. The twins had their stuff, and so, the four of them left that house for the last time. They got into the social workers car and were driven to the new place.

Preparing

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The bus ride to Impulse's house was calm. There were maybe five other people downstairs, and no one got on after Jimmy. He sat at the back and scrolled through his phone, looking at more fan art and fan theories about the new Hot Guy poster. Seeing it made him grin. Maybe one day he'd be on a Hot guy Poster.

He doubted it. Even if he did get through the auditions, he'd likely only get a background character. Nothing wrong with that, however, Jimmy would love a scene with Hot guy. He'd seen Scar act, and he was amazing. There was something about the way Scar could turn off his own personality and put on someone else's without second thought.

A notification pinged up on twitter. A personal message.

-

TekVariety

Did you stalk my account?

-

Jimmy thought back. Yes, he had liked a few of TekVariety's tweets, even once's from years ago.

-

SolidarityCanary

Might have. Got curious.

TekVariety

Why?

SolidarityCanary

Your account was interesting. Really cool art. Wanted to see if you had any more is all.

TekVariety

No, I don't normally put my stuff on the internet. Those ones had to be vetted millions of times before I even dared.

SolidarityCanary

You seem to like Decked out.

TekVariety

It's an ok game.

SolidarityCanary

Only an ok game and you make that art for it? Thought you'd be in love with it or something.

TekVariety

There's a lot that can be improved on it.

SolidarityCanary

Alright. If you say so. But I think it's amazing. Both opinions valid though.

-

Before Jimmy knew it, he was at his bus stop. His eyes widened as he nearly missed it and jumped up to press the bell. He shoved his phone into his pocket and held onto the metal bar as the bus stopped. Jimmy made his way down the middle and thanked the driver before hopping off. He looked left and right and followed the path down, past the coop and little Tesco's, then short cut down the alley and left by the park. A few more steps brought him to number 6 Acorn Road.

Impulse's house. Or his third childhood home. The one he shared with his sister Gem.

He got his keys out his pocket and unlocked the front door. "Only me!" He called.

Impulse poked his head around the kitchen door. He had a blue tea towel over his shoulder. "Jimmy, hey!" He greeted cheerfully. Impulse stepped out and gave him a tight hug.

Jimmy hugged him back. "Gem here?"

"She's upstairs." Impulse told him. His face formed into worry. "Are you ok? Gemmy said you needed help with something."

They went back into the kitchen and Jimmy took a look at the counter to see what Impulse was making. "Yeah, I got a recall for the auditions. You know Scar's show?"

Impulse nodded, smiling proudly. "Oh, that's amazing Jimmy."

He couldn't help but feel better at his dad being proud of him. "I just needed some help with the lines. I knew you two were free today."

"I'd love to help." Impulse put the tea towel back on the counter. "What do you need us to do?"

Gem came down at that moment.

Jimmy replied to Impulse. "Oh, I just need one of you to fill in the lines." He paused. "I haven't read it yet, so maybe a readthrough would help first."

"Of course." Impulse smiled.

Gem, figuring Jimmy hadn't noticed her presence, decided that would be a good idea to make him jump. She came right behind him, right to his ear and said very loudly, "Hi Jimmy!"

“Gem!” Jimmy jumped out of his skin. “No!” He laughed.

Gem ran away laughing and Jimmy chased her. “Ima get you for that!”

Impulse shook his head, chuckling. It was like they were eleven again. “Calm down you two.” He didn’t mean it. It was nice to see them laugh, after everything they’d gone through.

They were in the living room, holding cushions, ready to defend themselves if the other attacked. Grins were painted on their faces. Impulse sat down on the sofa. “So, what’s the script Jimmy?”

Jimmy and Gem dropped the cushions and came to sit next to their dad on the sofa. The former pulled up his phone. A notification showed from ‘TekVariety’, but he pushed it to one side and looked for the email. “This one. I think it’s a duologue between CuteGuy and Hot guy, but I know for a fact CuteGuy has already been cast.”

“Oh who?” Gem asked.

Jimmy smiled. “G. But that information is top secret.”

“We won’t tell anyone.” Impulse looked at the script as Jimmy showed him his phone. “I see. Gemmy, do you want to read in for HotGuy?”

Gem reached for the phone. “Sure.” She took a picture of it with her own phone and passed Jimmy’s phone back. “Ok, start when you’re ready.”

Jimmy looked at the words and took a breath, ready to start speaking. “Ok.”

-

A bit of time passed and soon, Jimmy knew a few of the lines by heart. He had started to put in some characterisation into CuteGuy. How would he say something? What was he feeling when saying this?

Impulse had made them lunch, leaving his kids in the living room to hang out for a bit. He came back with sandwiches. Ham for him and Gem and cheese and pickle for Jimmy. They thanked him and the three of them caught up with some things.

Jimmy fell out of the conversation after a time and leant back on the

sofa to look at his phone. He remembered the text from Tek. He would call them Tek for now.

-

TekVariety

Do you play Decked Out?

SolidarityCanary

I've only played the first one once, but I always play the second one. I love it. The design, the game play. Could play it for hours :)

-

Jimmy sighed and put his phone down, watching Gem and Impulse talk. It was fun hearing them talk. Gem spoke with her Canadian accent, but sometimes she slipped and said something in an English tone. The phrases too. Impulse hadn't adopted the British phrases too much. He still had his American Accent. "Dad, did you get used to British weather after living in a desert?"

Impulse turned and smiled. "Desert to English winter was hell of a jump. Lived in sweaters for months."

Jimmy smiled too.

Accents were weird. Pearl, his sister, carried with her a slight Australian Accent. Her father had been Australian, and she had picked it up. Funnily, Grian hadn't.

Jimmy smiled at his sister. "Gem, do you want to play a game?"

She looked at the time. "Yeah, I have a bit of time. What do you want to play?"

"I don't mind." He shrugged. "Dad?"

"Um, I would love to, but I have a meeting soon." Impulse got up.

Jimmy nodded. He got up, as did Gem. They headed upstairs. "We could play Stardew?"

Gem smiled. "Sounds fun."

They went up to one of the old PCs in the house and played Stardew Valley.

-

After spending the day with his sister and dad, Jimmy went back to his place to practice his lines and post some more things on Twitter.

He hadn't heard again from Tek all afternoon and evening. Jimmy assumed he lived in another time zone or was simply busy.

The sun had long since set and Jimmy was in the kitchen with some cookies and milk to dip them in.

Tek finally replied.

-

TekVariety

Sounds like you're in love with it.

SolidarityCanary

I am. You seem cool if you're into that. What else are you into?

TekVariety

If we're talking nerdy stuff, I like a bit of DnD.

SolidarityCanary

Really! Cool! I like superhero stuff.

TekVariety

I saw you retweet that hero thingy

SolidarityCanary

Yeah, that tv series is my favorite.

October 2008

The car drove into the stony driveway and the porch light came on. Lauren stopped the car. “We’re here.”

Jimmy blinked awake and yawned. He looked out the window. The house looked massive. Bigger than the ones on the estate anyway.

“Who are these people?” Martyn asked.

Lauren got out their paperwork. “A man named Xisuma. He’s new to fostering. Actually, I think he just qualified yesterday.”

Martyn huffed. “So, we’re guinea pigs?”

Lauren shook her head. “There’s nothing experimental about it. He’d fully trained and has a place for all of you.“

Martyn was quiet. At least they weren’t split up. He got out the car and went to get Jimmy out. The boy wanted to be carried. “Timmy, I can’t carry you. Come on, you can go to sleep in a bit. It was a few hours after his bedtime, so he was tired.”

A man came out the door. He was average height and muscular. “Hello, I’m Xisuma.”

Pearl exited the car after Grian, her bag in hand. She checked the car in case something was missing. Thankfully, they had got everything. After checking, she stayed close to her twin.

Jimmy hid behind Martyn and kept a hold on his arm.

Martyn opened his mouth to speak, but in that moment, being the adult in the room stopped and Martyn was left just a kid. A fifteen-year-old who didn’t need to be the grown up anymore. He didn’t speak.

Lauren kindly took over. “This is Martyn, Jimmy, and this is Pearl and

Grian.”

Xisuma smiled. “Did you want to come inside? Or we can talk out here for a little bit?”

“I need to put Jimmy to bed.” Martyn said before anything else could be said.

Xisuma understood and let them all in. “It is getting late. Would you prefer doing the introductions tomorrow?”

Martyn nodded a little. “Please.”

“Alright. Let me give you a quick little tour. This is the kitchen. You can come down at any time and get a drink. I have some cereal in this cupboard and the cups are in this one.” Xisuma lead them upstairs. Martyn decided to carry Jimmy up. The poor lad was falling asleep walking.

“I have three spare rooms.” Xisuma pointed. “I’ve set this one up for Jimmy.” The room looked fully decorated for a young child. “This room has two beds.” The twins claimed that one immediately. Xisuma opened up another door. “Martyn, this one is yours.” Unlike the other two rooms, this one wasn’t set up for children. It was more suited for his age and something lightened up in his heart. The last time he had a room to himself was... well... since before the twins were born.

Martyn took a quick look in. It wasn’t much.

It wouldn’t be for such short notice. The fact Xisuma had managed all this in such a short time was amazing

Xisuma showed them the bathroom and Martyn stopped in his tracks. “We forgot toothbrushes.”

Smiling, Xisuma opened a draw. “Not to worry. I brought some recently.”

Jimmy woke a little seeing one had Woody on it.

Martyn managed to smile. “Alright then, let’s do our teeth and get into Pajama's.”

As a last thought, Xisuma showed them where the towels, flannels, soaps and sanitary products were. Just in case. He left them too it and went downstairs to have a work with Lauren.

Martyn made sure everyone had done their teeth, and he put Jimmy to bed. He tucked him in with Woody and Norman. “Goodnight Timmy.”

Jimmy yawned. “Night Night. Love you.”

“Love you too.” Martyn went to the door. “Pearl, Grian, Tim’s going to sleep.”

“Ok.” Pearl and Grian went into his room and hugged him and bid him goodnight. “Love you, Timmy.” They told him and closed the door.

Martyn didn’t know how well Jimmy would do sleeping on his own. He didn’t think he had ever done it before. Before going to his room, he sat with Grian and Pearl. “We’ll be alright.”

Pearl hugged him. “What will happen to us Martyn?”

“I don’t know. I think they’ll try to look for any relatives to take us in?” Martyn said, although he truly didn’t know.

Grian looked up from the other bed. He was putting his socks on. “Do we have any?”

Martyn blinked, trying to remember. “Well, you two and Timmy still have a dad out there. I don’t know if either of them would want do take responsibility though. They would’ve stayed otherwise.”

Grian nodded. “Grandparents?”

“No. All gone.” Martyn shifted. “I think either we’ll stay here, or we’ll move around a lot. I’m hoping if we have to be here, then we can stay. That way we can stay together.”

Grian came over and hugged his older brother. “I don’t want us to split up either.”

Martyn put an arm around him.

“Why did they have to take us away from home?” Pearl asked. She held Tilly under her arm, closer.

Martyn thought before answering. “Because technically I’m not supposed to look after you for this long. Because I’m not an adult.” He looked at the window. The curtains hadn’t been drawn yet, but it was dark so he couldn’t see out. “Think you two can get some sleep?”

They nodded.

Martyn kissed the tops of their head's. "We'll be ok. You know where I am if you need me in the night?"

Again, they nodded.

Martyn got off the bed and left the room. He shut their door and went to his own room, shutting the door behind him. It had simple decor. A double bed, which was lovely, with soft bedding. There were shelves with book and room to put on any stuff he wished.

By the door, there was a wardrobe and a chest of draws.

Although simple, it was better than anything back home.

He sat on the bed and sighed. It was still early, but he felt he should get some sleep.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you liked the chapter

Also I have a Discord. It's Minecraft Youtube and Doctor who, so if you like one or the other or both, then please join. It is 15+

https://discord.gg/wvfCGGfc

'A guy called Tango'

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Soon enough, Saturday, the ninth, came around, which was the day of the audition. Jimmy woke early. The sun was low in the sky, but the birds were singing their morning songs outside.

He rubbed his eyes and looked at the time. No notifications. It would be silly at that time in the morning to get them.

Instead of scrolling on his phone, he got up and went to take a quick shower, putting it on cold to wake him up. He let the water wash over his skin for a few minutes before putting soap on his flannel.

One thing Jimmy always noticed was that Tek seemed to be online early in the morning or late in the afternoon. They must live in another time zone or something.

Ready, Jimmy sat at the table and scrolled through Twitter. He had what he needed, but the bus to the train station wouldn't be coming for another twenty minutes or so, so Jimmy had a little bit of time to chill at home. Tek was online.

He went onto his profile and saw another Decked Out painting. This time of a Ravenger; one of the creatures in the dungeon.

Jimmy smiled and liked the post. Afterward, he went onto direct messages.

-

SolidarityCanary

More amazing art!!!

TekVariety

You sound too excited for a piece of art.

SolidarityCanary

But it's such good art. Also, I don't know if this is overstepping, but are you from the US?

TekVariety

Arizona. You?

SolidarityCanary

Oh! My dad's from Arizona!

SolidarityCanary

I'm British though.

TekVariety

Isn't it early there?

SolidarityCanary

I have an audition.

-

Jimmy looked at the time and got up. The bus would be there soon, and Jimmy would rather not miss it. He left the house and locked up.

It was calm outside. No cars, no people. Just quiet. Only the birds and a cat. The air carried a chill that only summer mornings carried. Not cold, but not warm enough to go out bare-sleeved.

If only Jimmy had had the time to introduce himself to the cat. But alas, he didn't. The bus arrived almost as soon as he got to the stop. He got on, paid and found himself a seat. There were a lot to choose from. A couple of healthcare workers sat at the front, but apart from

that, the bus was empty.

He put his headphones in and went back to Twitter.

-

TekVariety

Have fun

SolidarityCanary

Thanks. Also, might sound farfetched, but you might know my dad?

TekVariety

I am going to ignore that question and forgive you. Only because it's stupidly early where you are.

SolidarityCanary

Fair.

-

The bus arrived at the train station, and Jimmy continued his journey to the Audition.

-

The audition came and went. Jimmy was sure he had done fine, but there was still a feeling deep in his stomach that it hadn't been good enough. He had messed up one of the lines; got his words mixed up. He was sure he wouldn't pass after such a blunder, but yet, he was

hopeful.

The days after the audition came and went in a blur.

A week or more passed, and Jimmy had texted this stranger every day. Most of the time, the messages started late afternoon, early evening, and went all the way through the night until Jimmy couldn't stay awake anymore.

It was nice having someone else to talk to.

Not that it meant he didn't have anyone. No. He had lots of people. His family.

-

A few days after the audition, Joel; Jimmy's brother-in-law messaged.

Joel: Hey lad, could you baby sit tomorrow night? Lizzie and I want to spend some time together and Sausage can't take him.

Jimmy smiled. It had been a while since he had seen his nephew Hermes. Now five, the boy ran circles around his father's and Lizzie. Although Lizzie could've been his stepmother, she didn't want to be. She was happy just being Auntie Lizzie.

Hermes was the son of Joel and one of Joel's close friends, Sausage. The men had never been together like that. They had just wanted to raise a child.

Jimmy texted back.

Jimmy: Of course I will!

Jimmy: It's been ages since I've seen him.

He put his phone down, smiling. Jimmy loved his family. He had a big family too, full of broken puzzle pieces that somehow fit together.

-

Grian: Hey Tim. Sorry I haven't been answering messages. Was

filming.

Jimmy: That's ok. How has it been? :)

Grian: Can't say much but it's been good. Love working with Scar

Jimmy grinned. He switched from messages to Twitter and clicked on Tek's profile to see the amazing fan work they did. Jimmy was reminded of the picture of the Dungeon Master. Grinning, he went to Tek's private messages.

SolidarityCanary

Is it too much to say that I think your art of the Dungeon Master is hot?

There was a long pause before Tek answered.

TekVariety

The Dungeon Master is a fictional character, but I'm sure he'd appreciate that you think he looks hot. The person he's based on also appreciates it.

SolidarityCanary

He's based off a real person!?!!!

SolidarityCanary

I suppose that makes sense.

TekVariety

Yeah, a guy called Tango.

SolidarityCanary

That's so cool! Does he really have blue hair and eyes?

TekVariety

Blond hair, blue eyes. But not Icy blue. More muted and gray.

SolidarityCanary

You sound like you know him really well.

SolidarityCanary

You two married or something?

SolidarityCanary

Oh my god I'm so sorry, I just called your husband hot!

TekVariety

Not my husband. I don't have a partner.

TekVariety

I'm laughing by the way. In real life.

SolidarityCanary

Not funny :(

TekVariety

It is a little

SolidarityCanary

Ok just a little.

SolidarityCanary

But if you do see this Tango, tell him I want to marry him :)

TekVariety

I'll pass on the message

-

Jimmy grinned, looking at the time and putting his phone down. "Oh, I should cook dinner. Martyn and Netty are coming." He got up and went to gather the ingredients to make a cottage pie. It was easy to make and should be ready by the time his brother and sister-in-law came by.

It was game night. An event they only managed to have once a month. The tradition had started years ago; around the time they started Martyn had moved away to live with Netty. It was to ensure they still saw each other.

This time, it would only be the three of them. Grian was filming, and Pearl couldn't make it.

Whilst Jimmy waited for the pan to heat up, he's mind pulled up memories from the early day's with Xisuma. Though he couldn't remember them too well, he knew they had been difficult for all of

them.

Secretly, Jimmy thought he had made those days harder, being young and naive.

-

October 2008

Jimmy woke in Martyn's bed along with Pearl and Grian. Martyn was awake too, looking up at the ceiling. "Martyn?" Jimmy spoked. He had Woody and Norman under each arm.

Martyn turned his head to look at him. "Hi Timmy." He muttered tiredly.

"Martyn, I'm thirsty." Jimmy told him. He sat up and looked around the room. Oh. He had forgotten about last night. For a moment, Jimmy thought they were home and had all fallen asleep in mummy's bed. He got off the bed so Martyn could squeeze himself out without waking Pearl and Grian. "Is mummy coming to get us?"

His brother paused and shrugged. "I don't know Timmy. Do you need the toilet?"

Jimmy nodded.

Martyn took Jimmy's hand. "Alright, you go, and we can get you water after." He took Jimmy to the bathroom. After a few minutes, Jimmy came out and took Martyn's hand again so they could go downstairs.

Jimmy looked around. It was different now the sun illuminated the house with its autumnal gaze. Brighter, but still unfamiliar. He held onto his brother tighter.

They went downstairs and through a door to the left, where the kitchen was. Martyn opened a few cupboards and found the one with the cups.

Wanting to be a big boy, Jimmy grabbed one of the cups, but another

caught on his hand and fell out of the cupboard onto the tiled floor. It smashed.

“Timmy!” Martyn pulled him out of the way of the broken bits.

Jimmy felt tears filling his eyes. They spilt over.

Xisuma rushed in. “Is everything alright?” He saw the crying boy and the smashed mug.

Martyn stepped back, pulling Jimmy behind him. “I’m sorry, it was my fault.”

Xisuma remained calm. “Accidents happen. It’s just a mug. Let’s get you to the living room so you don’t get hurt and I’ll clean this up. Did you need something from in here?”

Martyn looked down to the floor. “Jimmy was thirsty.”

“Do you want me to get you a glass of water Jimmy?” Xisuma looked at the young boy.

“Yes.” Jimmy nodded and wiped his eyes.

Martyn squeezed his hand. “Manners Tim.”

“Please.” Jimmy muttered.

Martyn took a breath and lead Jimmy to the other room. He didn’t know which way the living room was, so he picked a door and luckily picked correctly. The was a box of tissues on the windowsill so he got one for his brother. “Are you hurt?”

Jimmy shook his head. “Is he gonna be mad?”

Martyn sat with him. “I hope not Timmy. If he is, he won’t be mad at you because I told him I broke the mug.”

Jimmy leant into him. “I don’t want him to be mad at you.”

Just then, Xisuma came in with a glass of water for Jimmy. “Here you go Jimmy. Don’t worry, I’ve cleaned the mug up so it’s safe.”

Martyn narrowed his eyes. “You don’t seem that much older than me.” He crossed his arms.

Xisuma didn’t know how to answer that. “I suppose I’m not. Lets wait

until Grian and Pearl get up and we can talk. Did either of you want something to eat?"

Martyn shook his head. "No I'm alright thanks. Timmy? I can get you some toast or something."

Jimmy nodded.

"I can do it." Xisuma offered.

Martyn gave him a look. "I know how to look after my little brother." He got up and went to the kitchen.

Xisuma looked between the boys and decided to leave Martyn to it. Instead, he sat opposite Jimmy. "Hello Jimmy."

Jimmy looked at him and snuggled back into the sofa. "Are you mad?"

"About what?" Xisuma asked.

He blinked. "For breaking your cup."

Xisuma thought for a moment. "I'm not mad. Accidents happen. As long as no one was hurt."

Jimmy sipped his water. He didn't speak again.

-

A while later, after Jimmy was fed, Pearl and Grian came down still in their Pajamas. Grian was first and he poked his head around the door. He relaxed when he saw Martyn and Jimmy.

"Good morning Grian. Good morning, Pearl." Xisuma smiled.

The twins came in.

"Um, hi." Pearl said. They went to sit on the sofa next to Martyn. Jimmy crawled onto her lap. All four of them looked at Xisuma expectedly.

Xisuma sat forward on the sofa and thought about where to start. "Let's start with some proper introductions. I'd love to know when your birthdays are. Anyway, I'll go first. I'm Xisuma, but you can call me X, and my birthday is in August."

The twins looked at Martyn.

“Isn’t this in the paperwork?” Martyn asked.

Xisuma shook his head. “I know nothing about you, apart from your names and ages.”

Martyn sighed. “November the eighteenth.”

Grian and Pearl looked at each other to see who would go first.

Pearl did. “I’m Pearl.” She said quietly. “I’m ten. My birthday is May.”

Grian nodded. “Same.” He paused for a moment and put his hands in his pajama pockets. “You can call me G if you want. Don’t mind.” Grian looked away, not making eye contact.

All eyes turned on Jimmy. He moved in Pearls lap. “Hi, I’m Jimmy and I am six years old, and my birthday is April.” Jimmy smiled shyly at Xisuma. He had been nice to him, so he felt a little safer in his presence, although he was still weary.

There was a long silence, no one wanted to break it first. No one wanted to ask the questions because they knew they wouldn’t like the answers.

“Look.” Martyn started. “I appreciate you letting us into your home, but I’m capable of looking after my siblings.”

Xisuma nodded. “I wasn’t going to take that away from you Martyn. If it’s alright with you, I would like to help you look after them.

He thought. “Ok.” Martyn was hesitant.

Xisuma continued. “I don’t know how long you’re going to stay here for. It’s likely you’ll be here for about a week. Lauren’s coming in a bit. She’ll be able to tell you more.”

Martyn spoke again. “There’s no point searching for relatives. We don’t have any that want us. I just don’t want these three to be moved about. They need stability.”

“I agree. That’s exactly why my home is open to you.” Xisuma told them.

Jimmy turned to Martyn. “Are we staying here?”

Martyn didn’t know the answer. He looked at Xisuma. His eyes reflected the child he was, looking for answers. “Are we?”

Xisuma didn’t answer right away. “I can’t promise anything, but as I said, I want you four to have the stability and love you deserve. I can offer that to you if you want it. It would take time. These things don’t happen overnight. However, I can promise that for as long as I have you here, I will take care of you.”

Before anything else was said, there was a knock on the door.

Chapter End Notes

This slow burn is quite slow burny lol

Spaghetti Hoops

Chapter Notes

> Just a disclaimer, I don't know anything about the Foster Care systems so this is just from what I've researched.

Dear Mr. Solidarity

We would like to offer you a final audition for 'HotGuy.' that will take place on Friday, 22nd August at 11am. The same place as the last audition. We would love to see you there.

The Casting Agency

-

Jimmy had received the email on the way to Lizzie and Joel's, and he couldn't stop grinning. He was in the final stages of the auditions, which meant if he did well, he would have a part in his favorite show and get to work alongside his brother and Scar. This time, Jimmy wasn't going to tell anyone. He wanted it to be a surprise.

Actually, that was a lie. Jimmy had already pulled up Twitter to tell Tek. He wouldn't be able to have a full conversation. One, because he was almost at his stop on the bus, and two, it was three in the morning where Tek lived, and Jimmy doubted he'd be awake.

-

SolidarityCanary

Tek! I got into the final audition!!! :)

-

Grinning, Jimmy put his phone in his pocket and got off the bus. Lizzie and Joel's house was on the other side of town. Their house was at the end of the street and overlooked fields, which were currently golden or filled with stacks of hay bales. Their house was from the 1950s; built after a bomb had dropped on the previous residence during the war.

It was a pretty thing.

The front garden had neatly trimmed grass. Different flowers bloomed brightly in the flower bed by the window. Some of Lizzie's favorites, he spotted. There were some bees nearby. A white butterfly fluttered around him and Jimmy smiled.

It was such a beautiful place.

Jimmy went to the door and rang the bell.

Moments later, a man opened the door. Lizzie's husband Joel. One of Jimmy's best friends. He hugged him. "Hey."

Joel hugged him back. "Hi lad." Joel spoke with a slight South Yorkshire accent.

He let go and they went down the hallway, filled with photos and homeliness, and into the living room. Lizzie and Hermes were sat on the sofa. Peppa pig was on.

"Jimmy." Lizzie got up and hugged his younger brother. "How have you been?"

Hermes gasped and jumped up, joining their hug. "Uncle Jimmy!"

"I've been alright. How about you?" Jimmy picked the five-year-old up. "Hello Hermes."

Lizzie smiled. "Pretty well actually."

Joel sat on the sofa. "Jimmy, when we asked to babysit for the night, we didn't mean eleven in the morning."

Jimmy grinned. "I know." His smile faded and worry settled in. "Sorry I can come back."

Lizzie put a hand on his arm. "Did you just want to hang out with us for a bit?"

"Please." Jimmy looked away. "Sorry, I should've messaged."

Lizzie pulled his brother to the sofa. "Maybe, but it's ok." She paused. "Are you sure you're, ok?"

"Yeah, I'm sure, Lizzie." Jimmy had been fine, but now, he wasn't so sure. But he had been fine. Perfectly happy for weeks. Distracted by so

many good things happening and getting to see his family. “Did you want me to take Hermes somewhere?”

Lizzie and Joel gave each other a quick look. “Actually, I think I’d prefer if we played a board game.”

Joel agreed. “Oh yes. Hermes, could you get a board game for us please.”

Hermes jumped up excited and ran upstairs shouting, “Yay! Game time!”

Joel and Lizzie looked at Jimmy. “What’s wrong Lad?” Joel asked.

Jimmy shook his head. “Nothing.”

“Alright.” Lizzie sighed. “But if there was something wrong, you know we’d be here to listen, right?”

He nodded. “I know. I don’t have an end of people to talk to.” Jimmy’s gaze flickered around the room. He noticed they had added an extra photograph. A picture of Hermes.

Hermes ran back down with a Superman game. “This one!”

Joel took it. “Alright. You know I think you’re getting very good at this one with all the practice you’ve been getting.”

The little boy grinned.

The four of them went to the table and played the game. Hermes ended up winning with a bit of help from Lizzie.

-

That evening, Lizzie and Joel left for the night and Jimmy made dinner for himself and Hermes. “What do you want?” Jimmy asked him.

Hermes thought long and hard about it. “Spaghetti hoops!”

Jimmy nodded.

“You want them too Uncle Jimmy?” Hermes asked.

He paused as he reached the tin cupboard. “No, I don’t like them very much. Never have.” Jimmy opened the tin and poured it into a

microwavable pot. For some reason his heart started to beat fast, and he felt sick. Jimmy put the pot in the microwave and put it on for a few minutes. “Let’s go to the living room. We can watch a DVD or something.”

Hermes was excited about that. He rushed to get one. “Toy Story!”

Jimmy chuckled. “Solid choice.” He put it in for him and sat down. Jimmy looked at his phone. A message from Tek.

-

TekVariety

Well done. If I knew you, I’d be proud.

SolidarityCanary

Can’t be proud of a stranger? Lol

TekVariety

I don’t know you. You could be a serial killer in your spare time.

SolidarityCanary

So could you :)

TekVariety

Good day?

SolidarityCanary

Yee. Looking after my nephew.

TekVariety

I see.

SolidarityCanary

You?

TekVariety

At work.

SolidarityCanary

What do you do?

TekVariety

Game design.

SolidarityCanary

That makes a lot of sense for you.

-

The microwave pinged, and Jimmy got off the sofa to deal with Hermes' dinner. He decided he would eat later. "Hermes, dinner's ready!"

Hermes came in. "Thank you, Uncle Jimmy."

"It's alright." Jimmy sat with him, and they talked for a little bit. Occasionally, Jimmy glanced at his phone.

-

TekVariety

I'm kinda done with Twitter. Want to move to Discord?

SolidarityCanary

Sounds good. Are you the same name over there.

TekVariety

I'll send a link.

-

Jimmy liked the message and continued talking with Hermes. "Are you excited to start school?"

Hermes nodded. "Yeah."

He smiled a little. The tomatoey smell of the spaghetti hoops brought him back of the memory of...

October 2008

Xisuma stood up. "That should be Lauren. She's just here to talk some things over with us." He told them and went to answer it.

Jimmy looked over at Pearl and took some of her hair in his hand so he could play with it. It was something he did sometimes. Pearl had taught him how to do a simple braid so naturally, Jimmy wanted to do it all the time.

Lauren came back in with Xisuma. "Good morning." She smiled. "Did you all have a good night."

Jimmy nodded. He was the only one who did. Apart from having a bad dream and sneaking into Martyn's room, he had had a pretty good sleep.

It wasn't like Lauren was there to tell them anything they didn't already know. However, she had information that she didn't want to talk about. She didn't want to upset the kids, even though they wanted answers. It was such a rocky procedure. The situation was fragile and could be torn apart at any second. "First things first, do any of you have any questions."

They did. They had loads.

"Are we staying here?" Pearl asked.

Grian asked. "How long are we staying here for?"

"Are we going to have to speak in court?" Martyn asked. "And what about school? I have my mocks soon."

Jimmy couldn't think of a question yet.

Lauren looked at Xisuma and back. "Right. So, it looks like you might be staying here for the foreseeable future unless we find a relative or someone to take you in full term. There will be a court date. Not all of you will have to speak..." She was cut off by Jimmy.

"Martyn, what's court?"

Martyn swallowed. "It's where a group of people who decide if you've done something bad or not." He looked at Lauren. "So, mum's being charged?"

She nodded. "Yes, she's being charged. The court date will be in a few days. You can go back to school but, I think the one you go to is a little far away from here, if I'm, correct?"

Martyn looked down. "Just a bit."

Xisuma stood up. "Would anyone like some hot chocolate?"

That got the younger three excited.

"Alright, you can come and help if you want to. You can choose some toppings." He smiled.

Jimmy, Pearl and Grian got up and followed X into the kitchen.

Martyn didn't care about hot chocolate. Not at the moment. Instead, he sat on the sofa, opposite Lauren.

"How would you feel about talking to someone about your feelings?" Lauren asked softly.

He shrugged.

Lauren continued. "It might help. You don't even have to talk, but I would like you to try. Just once. I'll set up sessions for your siblings too."

Martyn hesitated before nodding. "I suppose. But I'm not traumitised so you're wasting your time."

She didn't respond to that.

"Have they arrested her?" He asked.

Lauren nodded. "This morning yes. None of you have to go to court. Statements will be alright. It might be the better option for the four of you."

Martyn thought about it. "The sooner the better. I don't want this hanging over their heads. Pearl and Grian worry enough as it is without adding this to the problem." He felt his eyes sting with tears. "I've been more their parent than she has. Haven't I."

Again, Lauren nodded. "Yes Martyn. It shouldn't have to be like that."

"I suppose." He paused and wiped his eyes. "I want to get this over with."

"Of course." She smiled. "Did you want to join the others for some hot chocolate? I've always found it calming."

On second thought, he really wanted hot chocolate. Martyn got up and went to the kitchen. It turned out they were making him a mug full of it anyway. It made him feel a little less shit.

Jimmy hugged him. "Hi Martyn."

He ruffled his blonde hair. "Hey Tim."

Xisuma handed him the first mug of hot chocolate. "Here you go Martyn."

Martyn held himself become tearful again. An adult had done something for him, out of kindness and they expected nothing back? “Thank you.” He took it and looked at it. The hot chocolate was topped with cream and marshmallows. It wasn’t even a special occasion. Martyn savored it.

X noticed he was becoming a little overwhelmed. “If you need to take it up to your room, you can.”

He nodded. “Thank you.” Martyn whispered and took his mug upstairs.

Xisuma continued to make drinks with the younger three. They had a great time. “Grian, I love the smiley face you made with the marshmallows.”

Grian grinned.

“I want to make a face too!” Jimmy announced.

“We can all make smiley faces.” Xisuma smiled and then it became a marshmallow art section.

Pearl made a robot face. "It looks like a robot.” She smiled.

“It does, doesn’t it.” Xisuma smiled back.

Readthrough

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Once again, Jimmy found himself on a train to London. He had his headphones on and watched as the world zoomed past him. Trees, fields with sheep and cows, rows upon rows of sleeping houses and unused train stations. There were a few people in the carriage with him. A man was in the row next to him in a suit, on his laptop. A woman had just come on the stop before wearing a leopard print coat and hot pink high heels. Jimmy wondered if she had just been on a night out.

His mind felt heavy, though Jimmy just put that to having to wake up this early in the morning. He wanted to Talk to Tek, but he had gone to bed just as Jimmy had woken. He had found a friend in the stranger. They spoke every day now, about silly little things. Things that didn't really matter.

Jimmy smiled a little, thinking about them.

A notification popped up on his phone.

'250 days clean.'

It sounded like he had been addicted to drunks. Jimmy inwardly snorted and swiped it away. That shit didn't matter anymore. Why did he still have that app?

Didn't matter.

Jimmy went onto discord and went to his and Tek's conversation and smiled seeing the words. The last message from Tek read,

TekVariety

I've got to go to bed, but I wish you all the luck for the audition. Tell me how it goes.

SolidarityCanary

I will 😴 Have a good sleep.

-

He didn't know why Tek's messages made him smile so much, but they did. Maybe it was because he thought of them as a friend? Yes, Jimmy had a lot of people, but they were his family. Jimmy had never had friends, not even when he was little. He'd always found it hard to make friends, in school or in general.

Jimmy stared at the messages for a good two minutes before putting his phone down and looking out of the train window. They were coming into the next station, but luckily, there didn't look like there was too many people.

A few got on and then the train pulled away again.

An hour into the journey, Timmy got a message from his dad, Impulse.

Dad: Did you want to come around today. I was thinking about lunch out?

Jimmy blinked and he clicked on the notification. He pulled up the typing pad, but his thumbs hovered over the letters, not knowing what to put because he couldn't go and the last this he wanted to do was make his dad upset.

Jimmy: I can't, I'm in London this morning :(

Dad: We can do it another day. Not to worry.

But Jimmy worried. He got a few more messages from Impulse but

chose to not look at them. Instead, he put his phone in his pocket and rode the rest of the train ride in silence. Eventually, the train pulled into the London station and Jimmy walked out with his backpack. He walked through the gates, scanning his ticket and went down to the underground to catch the tube to the audition place.

It wasn't a bad journey, though the tube was a little busier than Jimmy liked. He got off and went back to the surface. Despite the cloudy sky, the temperature was pleasant. Maybe even a little muggy.

He walked up to the place and signed himself in at the desk since there wasn't anyone there. Jimmy sat in the waiting room and waited.

Someone came through a door, but Jimmy didn't look up until they said his name. "Jimmy?"

Jimmy new that voice. "Scar?"

Scar was Grian's best friend and had been since they were young. By some extent, Jimmy supposed Scar was one of his friends too.

"I didn't know you'd got this far in Auditions." Scar grinned. He was wearing neutral clothes.

Jimmy smiled a little. "Didn't tell anyone."

Scar helped him up from his chair. "Today we're doing a little screen run together. To test our chemistry."

"Sounds cool. Is G here?" Jimmy asked.

Scar nodded. "Yeah, as side kick he needed to be here too." Scar lead him down the hall. They went into the studio. There were mirrors one end of the room. Scar went over to a desk and came back with some paper; a script. "You'll be reading in for this season's Villian."

Jimmy's eyes widened. "The Villain? Woah." He didn't know if he'd be good enough to play a Villian. That kind of role took skill and deep emotion. Jimmy took the script. "Thanks."

Grian came through the door. "Scar have you." He stopped and grinned, seeing his little brother. "Timmy!" Grian came over and hugged him.

“Hi G.” He smiled a little. “How’s it being CuteGuy?”

“Alright.” G let go. “We filmed episode one, but we’ve decided not to continue. Scar decided he wanted to put the next Villain in this season instead of waiting to put him in the next one.”

Jimmy nodded, smiling still.

Grian continued. “But he doesn’t have a name yet.”

Scar sat down. “We’ll call him something associated with whoever gets the role. You’re the last to be auditioned. Everyone else came yesterday.”

Jimmy looked down at the script. “You didn’t see my name on the list?”

He shook his head. “Nope. I don’t like to. Anyway, ready for your audition?”

The script seemed amazing. Jimmy was getting an early peak at the next season too, and season four hadn’t even come out yet. It was due to start tomorrow evening actually and the family were planning to meet up at Xisuma’s house and watch it. They were proud of Scar’s work.

Jimmy nodded. “Yes, I’m ready.”

-

After the audition, Jimmy sat with his brother, backs against the mirrors.

“Are you two coming home tomorrow?” Jimmy asked him.

Grian put on his favorite red knitted jumper. “Yeah, we’ll be back by dinner.”

Jimmy nodded. “Pearl should be coming home from her trip to Australia tomorrow.” He smiled a little. “I’ve missed you both.”

He put an arm around him. “I’ve missed you too Timmy. How’s life?”

Jimmy shrugged. “It’s alright.”

Grian narrowed his eyes. “You don’t seem like it.”

“Don’t I?” He asked. “Oh, probably just tired from waking up early.”

He didn’t seem convinced. “How’s therapy?”

Jimmy picked the skin under his nails. “Good.”

Grian sighed.

“Yeah, like you’re still going to yours.” Jimmy spat.

“Alright alright. No need to bite my head off.” Grian stood up.

Jimmy followed. “Sorry.” Great, now his brother hated him. “I should go back. Impy wanted to hang out with me.”

Grian nodded. “Alright.” He paused. “Tell me when you are home.” Another pause. “See you tomorrow.”

Jimmy went to get his bag. “See you.” He left the room and sat goodbye to Scar before heading to the tube station. Jimmy started the journey home and turned on his phone.

There were a few messages.

-

Dad: What about tomorrow before we go to X’s place?

-

Then a message an hour later.

-

Dad: Son, I know you’re worrying but there’s nothing to worry about at all.

-

And another.

-

Dad: Maybe I’m worrying too much about you worrying? But I know what you’re like, so to be clear, I love you son, and I always will.

-

Ok, so maybe that made Jimmy feel a little bit better. He replied.

-

Jimmy: I wasn't worrying dad. I love you too.

-

The train pulled out from the station and it took Jimmy back home. He spent the train ride getting caught up with his messages, both private and on group chats. Jimmy made a post on his fan account about the new season of HotGuy.

It was still too early for Tek to be awake.

-

When Tek finally woke up, Jimmy was snuggled on his sofa with a fluffy blanket, phone in hand and a cup of Yorkshire tea on the coffee table in front of him. The sun was still high and though the heat was blazing through the window, Jimmy still loved his comfort.

-

SolidarityCanary

I'm back. It went so well. Had fun. Good morning btw. You sleep good?

TekVariety

How long were you staring at my pfp for to see if I was online?

SolidarityCanary

A whileeee. :)

TekVariety

Starting to think you're obsessed with me.

SolidarityCanary

Only starting to?

TekVariety

Mmmmmmm yeah, you're deffo obsessed with me.

SolidarityCanary

Does this mean we're friends now?

TekVariety

I suppose it does, yes.

SolidarityCanary

Can I send you memes?

TekVariety

If you must.

TekVariety

Obviously, that means, feel free to send as much as you want to.

SolidarityCanary

Your sarcasm makes me laugh lol. Genuinely.

TekVariety

Good. My work here is done.

TekVariety

Talking about work. I drew another Dungeon Master thingy. Thought you'd appreciate it.

SolidarityCanary

I always appreciate Dungeon Master work!!! Show me show me!

-

Tek sent a picture of the Dungeon Master. Icy blue again but also incorporating some red. The man, though fictional, was beautiful.

-

SolidarityCanary

I really want to marry him. Blushing so much.

TekVariety

:)

-

Jimmy blushed hard. He felt ridiculous. Blushing over a drawing of a fictional character who was based on someone Tek knew. What was he, fourteen? No, even at fourteen Jimmy had more sense than that. Then again at fourteen, Jimmy didn't really fancy anyone. There wasn't anyone for Jimmy to fancy.

There still wasn't. That was why he was blushing over a stupid drawing.

-

The next afternoon, Jimmy went to his dad's place. It was just him and Impulse this time because Gem was at work until three.

"Dad." He smiled.

Impulse hugged him back. "Hey." He held him tight. "How are you doing?"

"Alright." Jimmy told him coming in. "You alright?"

Impulse nodded. "I'm alright Jimmy. How was your trip?"

Jimmy followed him to the living room and sat on his favorite space; the left side of the sofa by the bookcase. "It was fun. It was more for business than anything else though. Not gonna tell you why. It's a secret for now."

Impulse chuckled, amused. "Alright Jimmy."

Jimmy grinned. He sat back into deep thought. "Dad?"

Impulse sat next to him. "Mm?"

"I wonder what it would've been like if you hadn't come to the Uk." He said aloud. Everything would've happened so differently.

Impulse thought. Slight hesitation laced his voice. "Well, I'd be in Arizona with Gem, and you'd still have your family with Suma and your siblings."

Jimmy nodded. "True. I'd miss you both."

Impulse put an arm around him. "You wouldn't miss what you never had."

"True." He leant into his dad's side. "Aren't I too old for this?"

"You're never too old to get affection from your parent Jimmy." Impulse told him. "Are you sure you're alright?" He looked at him. "Because I'm not sure you are."

Jimmy closed his eyes. "Course I'm ok. I'd tell you." That was a huge lie. Jimmy wouldn't tell anyone if he could help it. Probably not even himself. He didn't know how tired he was until he was right next to his dad. "I have a new friend."

Impulse smiled, still holding his son. “That’s great.”

Jimmy nodded. “Online. Don’t know who they are, but they said they’re from Arizona.”

“Alright. Just be careful.” Impulse told him. “Want to watch a movie before we go?”

He looked at the time. “Um, can do.”

-

They put on a DVD’s and soon enough, it was time to go to Xisuma’s or Jimmy’s second home. They arrived after everyone else had because the film had been long. There stood Jimmy’s other dad. The first adult who had ever given a shit about him. “Suma!”

Xisuma turned. “Hi Jimmy.”

Jimmy hugged him tight. It had been a while since he’d seen him. “Is everyone here?”

“Yeah, in the living room.” He told him.

Jimmy went through and grinned. Everyone was there. Martyn and Netty. Grian and Scar, Lizzie and Joel, Gem and... “Pearl!”

Pearl turned and smiled. She looked exhausted. “Jimjam!”

They hugged.

“Missed you, Pearlie.” He grinned.

She ruffled his hair. “I missed you too.”

HotGuy’s theme tune came on and everyone hushed each other and sat on sofa’s, armchairs and the floor, eyes glued to the screen.

October 2008

Martyn was in the living room. The others were at the park with Lauren, and in front of him was a stranger. Xisuma sat beside him on the sofa for some support.

“Martyn. I need to ask you some questions if that’s alright? We can take a break at any time.” She told him softly.

He swallowed and nodded. His throat felt like sandpaper and the palms of his hands sweated. “Ok.”

“Your mother, how often have you seen her in the past twelve months?” She asked him.

Martyn took a moment to remember. “She comes back maybe... once a month for a week or something like that.” He told her. “Takes the Timmy and the twins to school. Tells them she’s ill so that’s why they never questioned why I collected him every day.”

She nodded, listening and writing it down on her paper. “When did you first look after your siblings alone?”

He shrugged. “Timmy was a baby. It was only for the weekend.” Martyn looked over at Xisuma before speaking again. “She needed time away from us. Think she was still with Timmy’s dad.”

“And then it started happening more often?” She asked.

Martyn nodded. “Yeah. I don’t know, she came back for house inspections and important stuff like that.”

“Did she leave you with any money? Food?” Was the next question.

Again, he shrugged. “Fifty pounds here or there?”

“And you had to do your own shopping?” She asked.

Martyn sighed. “Yeah suppose.”

The conversation went on. Martyn got through the questions and was allowed to leave. Next it was Grian’s turn. The park was only next door, so it was a quick walk. The ten-year-old got similar questions. G chose to have Professor Beak with him.

“Did anyone ever get hurt whilst your mum was away?” She asked.

Grian hesitated but nodded. He kept his eyes on his parrot, not wanting to make any eye contact at all.

She shifted in her seat. “Did you want to tell me about that?”

“Um.” He moved around on the sofa. “I fell down the stairs and broke my arm.”

“Did Martyn phone your mum?” She asked.

Grian looked up for a second. “I don’t think we had her number.”

“And Email address? Anyway, to contact her at all?” The questions were firing at him.

Grian fidgeted in his seat. “Yes? No.” He said finally. “I don’t think so.”

There was a minute before the next question. “What did you do if you ever ran out of resources?”

“Well, we got free hot lunches at school. Sometimes Martyn didn’t eat breakfast or dinner.” Guilt made his way onto his face. He only just realised what Martyn had done for them for years. Tears welled up in his eyes.

Xisuma stepped in. “G, you don’t have to do this if you don’t want to.”

He shook his head and hugged Professor Beak close.

“Let me get you a glass of water.” X stood and took a few moments to get him a glass of water. “Here you go.”

G took it and sipped the water. “Can I go?” He asked.

“Of course you can. Back to the park?” X asked.

G nodded.

Xisuma took him back to the park. He collected Pearl and brought her back to the house. They also asked her the same questions, and then she continued where Grian had stopped.

“Did she ever physically hurt any of you?” She asked.

Pearl thought about it. “Don’t think so but…” She paused and went white. The adults let her take her time. “She told us she would hit us if we weren’t quiet.”

She nodded and wrote it down. “What did your mum do when she was home?”

“Um.” She thought. “Mum slept a lot? Drank some special juice and went to her room, but we weren’t allowed to get her. It was more fun when Martyn looked after us. He loves us.”

After Pearl, it was Jimmy’s turn.

He sat close to Xisuma, woody in hand. Norman was asleep.

“Did she ever say anything mean to you Jimmy?” She asked.

Jimmy nodded slightly. “Makes me cry.”

“How did she make you cry?”

Jimmy sat Woody on his lap. “I don’t think mummy likes me.” He said sadly.

“Why do you think that?” She asked him.

He didn’t answer right away. “It’s all my fault.” Jimmy whispered.

Pause.

“Did she tell you that.” She asked.

Jimmy nodded. “She broke my old teddy bear. Martyn got me Norman. She threw Judy in the bin. Said it was my fault.”

Their hearts broke.

Xisuma knelt on the floor to get onto Jimmy’s level and looked him in the eye. Sincere. “Jimmy, none of this is your fault. You deserve all the love in the world.”

He shook his head. “She said I need to go to Hell.” Jimmy sniffed and curled in on himself.

“Did you want a hug?” X asked him.

Jimmy nodded.

Xisuma hugged the boy tightly, safely.

Jim sobbed.

X held him. “It’s alright. I’ve got you.”

The woman, Natalia, stood. “I’ll get Lauren and the other three back.” She said and left them.

Xisuma didn’t move.

“Timmy!” Martyn ran over. “What happened? Xisuma what happened?”

“It’s ok Martyn.” X said calmly. “It just got a little too much for him is all.” He sat on the sofa and Jimmy climbed into his lap.

Grian quietly sat beside them and leant his head on Xisuma’s shoulder, putting an arm around his little brother. “Tim, I saw a massive leaf pile outside Suma’s house, but we didn’t jump in it cus we’re leaving it for you.” He said softly.

Jimmy looked up and sniffed loudly. “Really?” He wiped his eyes and nose on his sleeve.

“Gross Timmy.” G made a face.

Jimmy giggled a bit. “Can Woody come too?” Tears still fell down his face, but he felt a little better now.

Xisuma leant over and grabbed a tissue and wiped the little boy’s eyes. “Woody can absolutely go too. I have to speak with Natalia and Lauren first, but I think it’s a good time for you all to get a drink. Especially with all these tears.” He said softly. “Crying is very thirsty work.”

Jimmy nodded.

X looked at Martyn. “Martyn could you…” Martyn cut him off.

“Yeah I’ll get them a drink.” He said.

Xisuma smiled a little. “Make sure you have one too. Then after we can all jump in the leaves together.”

Pearl reached for Jimmy’s hand and he got off Xisuma’s lap to grab it. Martyn took them into the kitchen, leaving the Adults to talk.

“So?” Xisuma asked them.

Natalia looked at the paperwork. “She’s unfit to look after them, but

this certainly might be enough to charge her with child abuse.”

X nodded a little. “And the kids?”

“Unfortunately, if we moved them, they would have to be split up.” She added.

“Ok.” Xisuma stood up. “Well, that settles it.” He paused and opened his mouth to speak again.

-

The kids had a marvelous time in the leaves. Jimmy laughed at the crunches beneath his shoes. “Best day ever!”

The other’s smiled.

Grian kicked the leaves over to Pearl and she did the same.

Martyn joined in too.

Only little kicks were allowed to prevent anything from going into anyone’s eyes.

Xisuma watched for a while, smiling with his whole heart. “It might be time to come in now. We can help each other make lunch, and then I have something to tell you. But don’t worry, it’s nothing bad.”

They nodded and followed him inside.

Jimmy carried Woody with him.

-

After they made and ate lunch, Xisuma sat them in the living room. “So, I was having a talk with Natalia and Lauren earlier, and I would like to give you four a permanent home here.”

Their eyes widened.

Xisuma continued. “I don’t expect anything in return. Together we can come up with some house rules, but the most important thing is that you are given the love you deserve.”

“But.” Pearl was the first to speak. “Why?”

“Because each of you are worthy of love and you deserve to be looked

after and cared for.” He told her.

She nodded a little.

Jimmy spoke. “So, we don’t have to be by ourselves anymore?”

“No Jimmy.” X said. He looked at Martyn. “ You don’t have to worry about money or where your next meal is coming from anymore. I’ll take care of all of that.”

A weight lifted from his shoulders. “You won’t throw us out?”

“Not a chance.” He told him.

“Home?” Grian asked, voice barely audible.

Xisuma nodded. “If you want it to be.”

He nodded too. “Please.” G looked at his sister. They gave each other a twin look, and she nodded too.

Jimmy grinned and looked at his eldest brother. “Are we staying here Martyn?”

All three of the siblings looked at their older brother for his answer.

The minute of silence felt like forever. Could they trust Xisuma? Was he really offering them a home?

In the end, Martyn cleared his throat. “Yes, we’re staying.”

Chapter End Notes

> Ranchers is slowly starting to show through I think. It'll defiently come up more next time.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

SolidarityCanary

What's your name?

TekVariety

Isn't that against online etiquette? What's yours?

SolidarityCanary

Jimmy

TekVariety

Cool name. You wouldn't believe what mine is.

SolidarityCanary

You comfortable with me knowing?

TekVariety

Tango

SolidarityCanary

I've heard of that name before.

TekVariety

Have you? ;)

SolidarityCanary

Have I?

TekVariety

I don’t know. Jimmy.

SolidarityCanary

You said my name so ominously.

TekVariety

Didn’t say anything. Was texting.

SolidarityCanary

Tango!!

TekVariety

What :)

SolidarityCanary

Oh my god I just realised. What if you’re like, fifteen!!??

TekVariety

I'm a 90s baby. Hope that puts your mind at rest.

SolidarityCanary

So, from 26 to 35? Nice. I'm a 2000s baby.

TekVariety

You're worried about me being 15? You could be 15!?

SolidarityCanary

Well. From 16 to 25.

TekVariety

You're 16!?

SolidarityCanary

No!! I'm 23!!

TekVariety

Well, that's a relief. Glad I wasn't flirting with a 16-year-old.

SolidarityCanary

You were FLIRTING!?

-

That was Jimmy's afternoon. He blushed deep at the thought of Tango flirting with him.

Now where had he heard that name?

Gem came in with a book. A new fantasy romance one she'd found. "Jimmy, you're blushing."

He hid his phone. "No, I'm not." Jimmy blushed. He got it out again so he didn't look like he was hiding anything. An email popped up from the agency and he sat up fast. "The Agency."

She sat next to him. "I didn't know you'd gone to the final audition."

"I kept it a secret." Jimmy smiled and pulled up the email. He read it through, eyes skimming the screen. His smile widened, reaching his eyes and lightening them up. "I got it."

Gem squealed and hugged him tight. "I'm so happy for you."

He grinned. "I got in Gem."

"You did." She pulled back. "This calls for some ice-cream."

Jimmy sat back on the sofa. "Sounds good."

Gem pulled him up. "But I don't have any here so we're going to have to go and get some."

He let himself be pulled up. "Fine. We'll get ice-cream, but I'm buying." Jimmy laughed a little. His phone pinged so he checked it. An Instagram follow from 'False Symmetry'. Jimmy stopped; his face fell.

Gem tilted her head. "What's wrong?"

Jimmy shook his head. "It's nothing." He turned his phone off and put it in his pocket.

She narrowed her eyes. "Right... well let's get sundaes. With strawberry and chocolate sauce or something."

"Yeah ok." He followed her and put his trainers on.

They walked down the street to the shops. Jimmy kicked his feet a little. "It was False."

“Mm?” She looked his way.

Jimmy put his hands in his short pockets. “False followed me on Instagram.”

Gem nodded a little, her posture deflating every so slightly. “Oh.”

“Yeah.” That was all that was said on the matter. The two went to get ice-cream.

-

SolidarityCanary

Can I give you my phone number?

TekVariety

Sure

-

Jimmy: Hey, Tango, 😊

Tango: Hello.

Jimmy: I got into the show

Tango: Well, done

Jimmy. You busy?

Tango: Yeah I’m at work.

Jimmy: I’ll leave you be.

-

He went onto Instagram and pulled up the notifications. The follow from False Symmetry. Jimmy stared at it, not knowing what to do; whether to follow back and message, or just pretend it never happened.

Jimmy turned in his bed and pulled the covers over him but found it too hot, so he pushed them away in frustration. Eventually he clicked on False's profile and scrolled down to see her photo's. There weren't many. A picture of a birthday cake from a month ago to show her twenty-third.

The one under that was a picture of False and a friend having coffee last Autum.

He closed his phone and chucked it next to him, turning over and trying not to let it affect him too much.

Jimmy wasn't angry at her. For a while he had been, but he'd been young and hadn't understood the situation. But still, it hurt. False leaving had... hurt.

The thought of it left a lump in his throat.

-

Jimmy: Are you still at work?

Tango: It's been five minutes. Am I going to regret giving you my phone number?

Jimmy: No. I can just bother you on Discord

Tango: True.

Jimmy: So, you're either 3 years older than me or 12 years older than me.

Tango: Which one would you prefer?

Jimmy: I like an older man/j

Tango: What makes you think I'm a man?

Jimmy: Sorry, I should've assumed.

Tango: It's ok. I am.

Tango: So, you like older men?

Jimmy: Noooooo how old's the Dungeon Master?

Tango: 28

Jimmy: I like my men 5 years older than me.

Tango: I'll be sure to let him know

Jimmy: Damn I forgot you knew him.

Tango: Lol

Tango: Right, I really need to do some work.

Jimmy: I'll speak to you later then?

Tango: Yeah, goodnight, Jimmy.

Jimmy: Night Tango

-

Jimmy turned off his conversation with Tango and was apart to settle down for the night but made a split decision to go into Instagram and follow False back. It was just a follow. Nothing bad would come from it.

-

A little bit of time went, no more than a fortnight, and it was time for Jimmy to start his job. The first day was simple. No filming happened. Just a read-through of the new and refined scripts. He sat next to his brother and Scar.

A rush of excitement filled him as he listened to the others say their lines. Jimmy had the occasional line in the early episodes, but as they went on, his time on screen went up. The plot developed and Jimmy was on the edge of his seat. He gasped. "Scar, that ending!"

Scar grinned. "Yes. Your debut as the Villian."

"And I get to have wings like Cuteguy?" Jimmy flicked through the pages.

"Yes Jimmy. We have some lovely wings in the costume rooms. Might be fun if they changed colours when Canary is relieved, but we can use a bit of editing for that."

Jimmy grinned. "When do we start?"

Scar was happy someone was as excited as he was about his project.

“Right away. We’ve booked days for roads to be closed when we’re doing some bigger scenes, but for now we can rehearse some stuff in the studios. Try on some costumes and see how they look on Camera. This is your first time on screen, right?”

Jimmy nodded. “Yeah. I’ve done a few theatre things.”

“We can give you some pointers if you need them.” Scar stood up and looked at his cast. It wasn’t very big. Not many main characters at all. Most were background actors who were civilians or unnamed hero’s/ villains.

Going along with the theme of character naming’s, most the characters had the same names as the Actor’s did. Scar was famous for it and had taken a mix reviews of praise and criticism.

“Mumbo.” Scar looked at his and Grian’s other best friend. “I have a new outfit for you to try on.”

Mumbo smiled. “Sounds cool.” He turned to Jimmy. “Welcome to the team Jim.”

Jimmy returned his smile. “Thanks.”

The lot of them went to the studio to work out the scenes. Scar stood at the front and directed in the parts he wasn’t in. When Hotguy was required, he directed from within the scene. He smiled watching his work come together. “Alright, can we skip to the end? I’m excited to see how this will go.”

Everyone went to get the script for the last episode in the season. The last scene. It was between Canary and Cuteguy. The other Actors stepped out and stood to one side, getting their water bottle or a snack.

Scar looked at them. “We can go to the flat tomorrow so we can feel it properly, but this will have to do. Imagine CG’s table here. Jimmy, you’ll be at the table with your evil plans drawn up on paper. CG comes home early and sees it, but you can’t cover it up. All the evidence is there that you made the threats to take over the city.”

Jimmy moved to where he was directed.

“Play around with it. We can change it if it doesn’t work.” Scar smiled.

Grian went to where the door would be and imagined he was in the flat. He had the script in hand. The scene started. “Jimmy I’m home.” He came in. “Classes finished early, there’s been another threat.” G stood at the imaginary table. “What’s this?” He picked up the imaginary papers.

Jimmy hesitated but remembered to just go with it. He tried to take the papers back to late. “Hey that’s mine.”

“Why do you have this?” G looked at it. “This is private information. Where did you get it?”

Jimmy stood up. His face grave. “Give it back.”

He didn’t.

“I’m warning you. Give it back and pretend you saw nothing.” He tried to snatch the paper back.

Grian pulled it away. “Where did you get it from?”

“Don’t ask questions you don’t want the answer too.” Jimmy told him.

“What will you do?” Grian asked. “If this stuff fell into the wrong hands, then, this could be the end of the city. Do you understand that?”

Jimmy blinked, looking at the script. “Ever considered it’s already in the wrong hands?”

“What? What are you on about?”

Scar grinned. “Magic superhero stuff. Whoosh.”

Grian smiled, breaking character, but went back into it almost immediately. “It was you all along? Jimmy, no. You can’t be, you’re my little brother!”

Jimmy stalked towards him. “I’m Canary.”

Scar walked into the ended scene. “That’s going to be amazing. Maybe we should film that bit first. Thoughts?”

“I’d prefer to let us develop the character’s a little more Scar, if that’s ok?” Grian asked.

He nodded. “That does sound like a better idea. Ok let’s try on some costumes. Tomorrow we can reshoot the first scene of the next episode because we didn’t have Jimmy before. Thankfully I put in that you had a brother in the first episode. Oh, and I booked the photographer for next week for the posters. Gives us time for any costume adjustments. Jimmy can put the poster on his fan account.”

Jimmy flushed. “I don’t have a fan account.”

“Sure, you don’t Tim.” G teased.

Jimmy followed them out, laughing a little. “I don’t!”

-

Tango: How did it go?

Jimmy: So good.

Jimmy: Wish I could tell you, but I’d get my arse kicked if I spoiled anything.

Tango: It’s ok. Just tell me when it comes out so I can watch it.

Jimmy: You want to watch what I’m in???

Tango: Of course. You’re my friend aren’t you?

Jimmy: Yeah we friends :)

November 2008

It was Martyn’s birthday.

Xisuma knew that because Grian had told him what day it was on and from then, X had planned to make it the biggest birthday he had ever planned. It was easy enough, especially with the help of Martyn’s younger siblings. All three had been excited to help.

It had been a month since they had arrived with nothing but the

clothes on their backs, but now their rooms were filled and decorated with what they wished. Not fully. The rooms were half painted, with bits and bobs everywhere.

Xisuma had reminded himself that as amazing as it was to lets the kids decorate their rooms, he needed enough money to buy them food and clothes.

Jimmy had opted for a toy story themed room. The walls were baby blue already so all they needed was some clouds. Xisuma found wall stickers on Amazon and the little boy was quite happy.

Pearl and Grian wanted a whole scene painted on their wall so X had to get a painter in. A castle on a mountain, over looking a town. In the sky were hot air balloons and birds. Lots of birds. G loved birds and Pearl loved Castles so it was a compromise.

Martyn settled for the room he had, but when prompted, he asked for a computer.

Xisuma had started to save up for it. It would have to be a Christmas present unfortunately.

On the night before Martyn's birthday, Xisuma became busy. He blew up some balloons and put them on the floor in the living room. He wrote a card and put it with the ones he had helped the other kids write. On the coffee table were four presents wrapped in the same wrapping paper. One from X and three chosen by the others.

The cake could easily be made tomorrow.

Looking around the room, X was happy with the decorations. He didn't want it to be over the top.

-

Jimmy woke first. The boy was too excited to sleep because it was his big brother's birthday. He ran into Grian and Pearls room with Norman under his arm, and climbed onto his brother's bed. "G! It's Martyn's birthday!"

The older boy turned and woke. "Timmy it's early." He rubbed his eyes and buried his face in his pillow. "It's still dark."

Jimmy huffed and got off, going to Pearl's bed. "Pearly, it's Martyn's birthday."

She opened her eyes and looked at her alarm clock, which she could see because her night light was on. “The small hand is at five. It’s still sleepy time Jim.”

The small boy pouted and left the room, shutting the door behind him. He was at a loss. Jimmy wanted to go to Martyn, but the birthday downstairs was a surprise and he knew his brother would hate getting up so early. Jimmy was worried to go downstairs in case he got told off. He wouldn’t get told off, but he was still scared of it happening.

Instead of going back to his room, he sat on the top stair of the staircase and looked down into the dark. It was unsettling, but he had Norman. Besides, Jimmy was a brave boy wasn’t he?

He laid his head on the wooden banister, which wasn’t the most comfy, but it wasn’t the end of the world.

After two minutes, which felt almost forever for Jimmy, he stood up and went to the door of Xisuma’s room.

The man had told them they could come and get him throughout the night if they needed him.

Jimmy hesitated as he reached for the door handle. He opened it ever so slightly. “Suma?” He spoke into the dark.

There was a rustle of bed covers. “Jimmy?”

Jimmy could hear Xisuma’s soft footsteps come towards him. X turned the bedroom light on so they could see each other. Jimmy stayed quiet.

“Are you ok?” X asked.

He nodded. “It’s Martyn’s birthday.”

“Ah I see, you’re excited.” X knelt down in front of him. “It’s very early in the morning though. Think you can manage to go back to sleep for another hour?”

Jimmy shook his head. “Norman wants to surprise Martyn.”

X smiled a little. “Jimmy, I promise, we will give Martyn the best birthday ever, and you can help. But for now it’s a good idea to get a little sleep. Come on, I’ll take you back to bed and tuck you back in.”

He stood.

Jimmy took his hand even though they were going to the other side of the corridor. “I don’t want to go the sleep Suma.”

“I know Jimmy. But sometimes it’s good to try.” X got him back into his room and tucked him into bed. “It’ll be time to get up when the little hand gets to 7.”

Jim looked at his clock, also illuminated by a night light. He nodded. “Ok.”

“But if you really can’t do it, then come back and get me and we can get breakfast downstairs.” X said and left the room to get a bit more sleep.

Eventually, Jimmy managed to sleep.

In fact, he slept so much that it had gone past eight AM by the time Martyn came in the wake him up. He sat on the bed and stroked his hair to wake him. “Timmy.”

Jimmy blinked awake and gasped. “Martyn! It’s your birthday!” He hugged him.

Martyn smiled. “I know. Lets go down and get breakfast. Suma’s making Pancakes.”

“Pancakes!?” He squealed. Jimmy climbed off the bed and ran off the door. “Come on Martyn. It’s birthday time!”

Martyn followed him down. He hadn’t gone downstairs yet. When he came to the living room, he blinked. “Oh.”

Jimmy gasped and ran in. He picked up some ballons and threw them around. “Martyn, open your presents.”

Grian and Pearl came in. “Breakfast’s ready.” Pearl said.

Martyn nodded. “Ok thanks. Come on Timmy, we can do this later.”

Jimmy followed him into the kitchen and sat at the table. He beckoned his brother to sit next to him. “Martyn gets the first pancake.”

X smiled and gave Martyn the second pancake cus the first was always the worst one. “Happy birthday Martyn.”

He smiled a little. “Thanks.” Martyn didn’t remember the last time an adult had given him something like this. Especially for his birthday. His mother had maybe thrown him a little party when he had turned five.

They all came to the table and Xisuma dished out the pancakes. “Here you are.”

“Thank you Suma!” The kids smiled.

Martyn ate his pancakes. It was no time to be sad about not having this before now. He was going to enjoy his day.

Jimmy grinned, syrup running down his chin. “So yummy Suma.”

Xisuma silently laughed. “I’m glad you’re enjoying it Jimmy.”

-

It was school a school day near the end of November and Jimmy’s class were excited about Christmas. They sat on the square carpet, each student having their own personal square to sit on. Jimmy had a triangle .

Mrs. Norris stood upfront, a middle aged woman with greying hair in a bun, and glasses. Next to her was a girl, who’s blonde hair was in a pony tail. “Good morning children. We have a new student joining us today.” She looked down at the girl. “Why don’t you introduce yourself.”

The girl smiled nervously. “Hi. I’m False.”

The class either said ‘hi’ back, or just waved.

The teacher smiled. “Now who would like to be False’s buddy for the day?”

Everyone put their hands up, excited at the thought of making a new friend.

“Jimmy.” Mrs. Norris said softly. There were a couple of disappointed sounds in the room. “You can still play with False if you want to. Jimmy, give us a wave so False knows who to sit next to.”

Jimmy waved, giving a little smile. He didn’t have any friends. Maybe that was why the teacher picked on him, but Jimmy didn’t know that. He was happy he got to look after False for the day. The buddy system

meant that the new children weren't alone and they had someone to show them about.

False made her way over and sat on the space next to him. A circle.

"Good. Jimmy, your task today is to make False feel welcome here. That being said, I expect you all to make False feel welcome." She told them. "Today we're going to start with numeracy. Last week, we worked on our three times tables and you all did so well, so today, we are going to start on our four times tables."

There was quite a lot of enthusiasm for a lesson about the 'four times tables.'

They started off with a song and then moved on to some worksheets. Jimmy brought False over to his spot at the back of the room. "The pencils are over here."

False smiled. "Thanks." She got a pencil.

Jimmy smiled back.

She looked around at the class. All the children seemed to be in groups. "Do you always sit by yourself?" False asked.

Jimmy looked up from his math's and nodded. "Yeah. There's no seats left at the other tables."

False frowned. "But they can sit with you."

"No." He shook his head. #

"Why?" She asked.

Jimmy shrugged. "They've got mummy's and daddies. That's what G says."

She looked at him. "G?"

"My big brother." Jimmy smiled. "He and Pearly are in year 5."

Her eyes widened. "Woah."

Jimmy nodded. "And my biggest brother Martyn is in high school."

False looked impressed. She thought for a moment. "You don't have a mummy or daddy?"

Jimmy’s face fell. “No.”

She regretted asking. “Oh.” False paused. “I don’t either. I live with my Auntie.”

Jimmy looked back up, his expression hopeful because he wasn’t alone anymore.

False continued. “My mummy and daddy died when I was little.”

“That’s not good.” Jimmy said and wrote down 4 x 5 on his worksheet. “Daddy left and mummy is in prison. But I have Suma.”

False finished her sheet. “Suma?”

Jimmy didn’t know the answer to that. “A new daddy?”

“Oh ok.” She shrugged. False had made her mind up. She liked Jimmy, but she hated the others for leaving Jimmy out. “Are we best friends now?”

He lit up. “A best friend!?”

False nodded. “Yep.”

He jumped a little in his seat. “I’ve never had a best friend.”

She smiled, glad that Jimmy had one now.

Chapter End Notes

> From what I understand about Foster Care in the Uk, which is next to nothing apart from what I've researched, is that organising a supprise for your foster child that you don't know too well probably isn't the best idea. Especially if there's trauma involved.
>
> On another note, I've decided to spontanuously add a False Symmetry story line.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

> Ok, so a little warning, Jimmy's mental health is getting worse :(There is a mention of him spilling hot tea on his hand and not really reacting to it.
>
> On a lighter note, and a little feature of this chapter; Little Jimmy is gonna make a new friend :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A fluffy kitten sat in the corner of the living room, tail gently brushing along the floor. To his left, another cat came over and settled himself next to him. Both cats were in the window-shaped spot of sun on the floor.

Jimmy grinned as he watched the newest members of the family. He had to admit he had got them spontaneously last week as he walked past a cat cafe, where you could adopt the cats. He was allowed to take them home yesterday. Jim took his phone out of his pocket and pulled up the camera. He snapped a few photographs and sent the pictures to everyone who would listen.

The family group chat and Tango.

He got off the sofa and sat with the cats, taking another picture of the three of them and, alternately, sending that one into the family group chat too. Jimmy hesitated before also sending it to Tango. They had never sent photos of each other before. They'd only texted.

-

DadSuma: You have cats?

Dadpulse: I didn't know you were getting cats.

Grian: Aww they're so cuteeee!!!

Timmy: Norman and Flick

Gem: Aww Jimmy!!

Pearl: They're so fluffy

Lizzie: Aww

Joel: Not as cute as my cat lol /j

Joel: They are very cute

Martyn: Cute. You never said you were getting cats Timmy.

Timmy: Spontaneous decision.

Scar: Aww they should come and meet Jellie, Katy Bee and Mr. Finney!

Timmy: Yeah!!

Netty: Aww they're so cute xx

Timmy: They are 😊

-

Jimmy lay back on the floor. Now that he had cats, he could hide the empty feeling in his brain. They added a bit of fluff in his mind, and now the house wasn't empty.

He clicked onto Tango's chat. The message had been read about three minutes ago. Jimmy went red and deleted the photograph immediately.

Little dots appeared on the bottom of the screen to show him that Tango was typing. They disappeared and then reappeared.

-

Tango: Why'd you delete the picture?

Jimmy: In case I went overboard?

Tango: You didn't. You were cute.

Tango: With the cat's I mean.

Tango: Very cute with the cats

Tango: What are their names?

-

Jimmy blinked. His face flushed again but for a different reason.

-

Jimmy: Norman and Flick.

Tango: Can I have the photo back please???

Jimmy: Suppose so 😊

-

Jimmy sent the photo again.

-

Jimmy: Why do you want it?

Tango: Working out what color your eyes are in the light.

Jimmy: Why do you need to know what colour my eyes are?

Tango: They're an interesting color.

Jimmy: Stop staring at my eyes lol

Tango: Ok, what about your lips?

Jimmy: Nooo!! Tango!!

Tango: Am I making you uncomfortable?

Jimmy: No, that's the worst part!!

Tango: I'll stop.

Jimmy: Don't.

Tango: I probably should. You don't know me.

Jimmy: But we've talked like every day for a month.

Tango: Yeah, but you shouldn't trust people you meet on the internet.

Jimmy: I know. But we're friends, aren't we?

Tango: Yes, we're friends. I'm sorry about the teasing.

Jimmy: It's fine. Really.

Tango: Still.

Jimmy: I have to go. I'll speak later.

-

Jimmy put his phone down and looked at his two new friends. "I'll get you something to eat." He got up and went to put food in their bowls. "Well, that was rejection if I've ever heard it." Jimmy put the bowl on the floor. The cats ran over. "I'll probably need to ask Martyn to look after you whilst I'm filming tomorrow."

They didn't pay Jimmy attention. Their thoughts were on the food they were eating.

He stared at them. "Well. At least you're enjoying your dinner." Jimmy went to the cupboard to see if he had any tins. There were some baked beans and a few tins of soup from last winter which probably needed eating soon. Jimmy closed the cupboard again and sighed. "I'll order something, I think." He went to the living room and sat down, pulling up Deliveroo. Jimmy had a notification from his calendar. He swiped it down and went pale.

Jimmy had had the same system on his phone for the past ten years, meaning everything had been synced up, including his calendar. He'd almost forgot he had put that reminder on his phone.

-

Mum gets out of prison

-

Originally, she had only got an eight-year sentence, but according to Martyn, Theft and dangerous driving had been added, leaving her with a sentence of seventeen years. No one had been around to bail her out, so unusually, she had to serve full time.

Jimmy cursed his younger self for reminding him. He put his phone down and closed his eyes. What was he doing?

The empty feeling he attempted to hide earlier, returned. He lay on the sofa and grabbed one of the fabricked cushions with his fisted hand, smashing it onto his face. It brought him darkness.

A knock on the door brought him out of his mind. Jimmy got up, taking a breath. He answered it.

It was X.

“Hi.” He managed a smiled.

Xisuma smiled back. “Hi Jimmy.”

Jimmy let him in.

“I just came to bring back that book you lent me.” X handed him a carrier bag with the book inside. “It was very good.”

He closed the door and grabbed the back. “Oh right.” Jimmy went to the kitchen to put the kettle on for the two of them.

Xisuma followed him in. “Are you ok son?”

“Yep.” Jimmy wondered if anyone else remembered what today was. “Heading to London tomorrow. For some filming.”

X leant against the counter. The kettle boiled and hot steam piled out from it. “Filming?”

He furrowed his brow. Hadn’t he told him? No. He’d only told Gem and Tango. “Oh. Filming for Tv show.”

Xisuma smiled. “You got in? Oh Jimmy, I’m so proud of you.”

The praise should’ve made him feel warm, but it left something ugly in his stomach. Like he didn’t deserve to be proud of. Jimmy poured the boiled water into the mugs which already had the tea bags in. He went to the fridge and put a splash of milk in his. X liked his without.

“Thanks.” X took his mug of tea and sipped it. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Jimmy sipped his own. “Talk about what?” He didn’t meet his gaze. His eyes stayed firmly on a red stain on the counter. Likely tomato sauce.

Xisuma set his mug on the side. “Jim.”

Jimmy took a large gulp of tea.

“Jimmy.” Xisuma’s voice softened. “Whatever is going on...” He was cut off.

“Nothing is going on, Suma.” Jimmy put the mug on the counter a little too hard. Tea sloshed over the edge, burning his hand, but he didn’t react, neither did he move his hand away. It hurt. He felt tears stinging the corners of his eyes.

X looked at him and then down to his hand. “Ok. Back your bag. You’re staying at mine tonight.”

Jimmy blinked. “But the cat’s.”

“They can come too.” X told him. He went over and took Jimmy’s hand off the mug. “Let’s get this sorted first.”

They ran cool water over it. “I’ll message Martyn. Need to ask him to baby sit the cat’s tomorrow anyway.”

Xisuma nodded a little. “Problem sorted. I can drive you to the train station tomorrow.”

“Ok.” Jimmy muttered. He was grateful for everything X did. Part of him wished X didn’t do everything he did for him. It would be much easier than.

It was stupid that he had been in a perfectly good mood earlier and now, he was in whatever mess this was.

Jimmy packed some stuff in his bag along with everything he needed for tomorrow, and texted Martyn before he, his dad and the kittens got into the car. Martyn had agreed to cat sitting thankfully. Jim put his earphones in and listened to some music as Xisuma drove them away.

He looked at his messages with Tango.

Why did it feel like he had ruined everything?

January 2009

It was a cool and crisp winters morning. Frost still sparkled on the grass and the pavements from the night before, making the leaves and the grass crunchy, as if it had snowed. It hadn’t there, much to the

disappointment of all the children. This meant no snow day, which unfortunately meant everyone still had to go to school.

Jimmy was all alone as he played with the digger in the sand tray at school. False was poorly today which meant Jimmy couldn't play with her and that made the boy sad. He sat in his corner and did his work by himself. At lunch, he ate his packed lunch by himself and at break time, he played by himself. Well. That was until Grian, Pearl and Joel came over.

Joel was one of Grian's best friends.

"What are you doing by yourself Timmy?" Grian asked, sitting next to him. The juniors technically had a different space to play in than the Infants, but no one listened to that rule, especially when it came to siblings. That, and the teachers felt sorry for them because of their situation.

Jimmy looked up. "Falsey is poorly."

They sat down beside him.

Joel spoke. "What and no one else is playing with you?"

Jimmy shook his head sadly.

"Don't worry lad. I'll beat them up for you." Joel put a hand on his shoulder. It made Jimmy laugh a little at least. "Anyway. It's much cooler to play with us than those idiots."

That made Jimmy feel less lonely.

"What are you playing?" Pearl asked.

Jimmy shrugged. "Just pushing sand around."

Grian went to get some more diggers. "We can have a digger party."

The little boy smiled.

-

That evening, Jimmy hovered by the living room door. The weakest link was quietly playing on the television. Dinner could be smelt from the kitchen; a cumulation of spices that Jimmy couldn't identify. Xisuma was on the sofa, watching the television. Jimmy didn't know where the others were. He thought Martyn was in his room doing

homework. Pearl and G were in the kitchen, mostly likely drawing at the table.

Jimmy held Norman under his arm and stayed in the door for a good ten minutes before he spoke. “Suma?”

Xisuma turned. “Hello Jimmy. Are you ok?”

Jimmy nodded. “I want to see if Falsey is ok.”

X turned the tele down and faced him properly. He took a quick look at his watch. It was four thirty. “I don’t think we’d be able to see her today, but it’s not too late to phone her aunt. I can’t promise that you’ll be able to speak with False though.”

He nodded again and watched Xisuma walk to the landline. X had exchanged numbers with False’s Aunt just before the Christmas holidays as both Jimmy and False wanted to play at each other’s houses.

It had been easier for False to come to theirs rather than the other way around. Xisuma didn’t know False’s aunt and would rather not take Jimmy to a strange place after everything that had happened recently.

He dialed the number, copying it from his notepad of numbers.

Jimmy waited and hoped.

“Hi, this is Xisuma. Jimmy’s Foster parent.” X leant against the wall. “Yes thanks, Jimmy was wondering if False was feeling better.” Another pause. “I see. I’ll tell him. Thanks, have a good evening.” X put the phone down.

Jimmy looked up at him with hope.

X turned to him and came over. “False is feeling a little better, but she’s resting at the moment. She should be back to school on Monday.”

The boy smiled. “Ok.”

The oven pinged from the other room to tell them that dinner was ready.

Jimmy gasped. “What’s for dinner Suma?”

“Sausages, peas and mash.” He spoke.

Jimmy grinned. “Yummy!”

Xisuma smiled and ruffled his hair a little. They went to the kitchen.

-

Monday morning, Mrs. Norris stood at the front of the class and welcomed all the children in. The children sat on their squares and chatted to each other about their weekends.

Jimmy hung about at the back of the classroom where the door was, waiting for False.

The door did open, but it was just a man and a little girl, whom Jimmy had never seen before. She had red curly hair. The man was tall, and the girl tried to hide behind him.

“It’s alright Gem.” He told her softly. Jimmy noticed his had a funny voice. American? Like all the people on the DVD’s Xisuma liked to watch.

Jimmy got his bottle and filled it up in the sink the classroom had. Just an excuse to stay at the back. He watched the man and the little girl.

Mrs. Norris came over to them whilst the class chatted. “Mr. SV and Gemini?”

The girl, Gemini? Hid behind the tall man.

“Yes, that’s us.” The tall man said. “I’m sorry, it’s been a hard time. Is it alright if we...”

Mrs. Norris nodded. “You can sit at the back with her until she gets more comfortable. I understand.” She turned to Jimmy. “Jimmy, why don’t you find your square to sit on?”

Jimmy hesitated. “I’m just filling up my bottle.”

She sighed. Jimmy’s bottle had been full for a while. “Could you turn the tap off then? You’re wasting water.”

Jimmy turned the tap off.

“You can sit by the door and wait for False, as long as you promise to

listen and join in." She told him.

Jimmy nodded and went to his normal seat.

The tall man took Gemini's hand and brought her to the same table Jimmy sat on. He didn't know why. There were plenty of other empty tables.

Jimmy listened the best he could, glancing at the door occasionally. He took a few looks at the tall man and Gemini. The girl had tears in her eyes and Jimmy's heart dropped. He hated to see anyone cry. He knew what that felt like.

Because they were one of the younger classes of the school, they were allowed to take in a toy. Jimmy didn't normally bring his toys with him, but today he had brought Norman. He went to his bag and went to get the teddy out. Nervously, he came up to Gemini and held out his teddy to her.

The girl sniffed, a little weary, but took Norman all the same.

The tall man smiled. "Thank you." He whispered to Jimmy, as not to disturb the class.

Gemini held Norman close, giving him a big hug. She relaxed a little.

Jimmy sat back down in his chair. This time he kept an eye on the door, Gemini and the tall man and Norman.

False *finally* came into the class. She still looked pale.

Mrs. Norris smiled. "Ah False you're here. Let's get the register sorted. Ben and Amy, you can take it to the office when I'm done. After the register, I have a new friend to introduce to you all."

Gem looked up at Impulse. "Impy, what's the teddy called?" She asked in a whisper.

False sat next to Jimmy at the table. She didn't know why he was there or who those two random people were, but she went with it.

Impulse answered her. "Why don't you ask the little boy yourself?"

Gem shook her head.

"It's alright Gem." He told her. "I'll be right here."

She took a breathe and got up from her chair to the other side of Impulse where Jimmy sat. Gem hesitated. “Hello.” She muttered.

Both False and Jimmy turned.

She held the teddy closer. “What’s the teddy’s name?”

Jimmy smiled. “Norman.”

Gem looked at the teddy. He was well loved. “I’m Gem.”

“Gem.” Jimmy sounded the name. “My name is Jimmy.”

Gem smiled a little and turned to False.

False smiled back. “I’m False.”

Impulse moved to the chair that Gem had originally sat on. “Why don’t you sit here Gem so you can talk a little more to Jimmy and False.”

Gem nodded and sat down. She kept a hold of Norman. Jimmy didn’t seem to mind that she had him. Obviously, she would give him back.

Of course, Mrs. Norris heard the three children talk at the back of the class, but she let it slide just this once. Knowing what she did about their backgrounds, they deserved to have a little time just to be children and make friends.

Chapter End Notes

> Would you believe me if Rancher's get almost fully Ranchery next chapter?

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Content warning. Nightmares, panic attacks, and bullying

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Summer slowly dwindled into Autumn and Jimmy's life became a routine of filming, posting on Twitter and texting Tango. Much to Jimmy's relief, Tango didn't hate him. Because Tango was making a game, their talks were now shorter.

Jimmy was in a similar predicament. Filming had taken up his entire life and they had only just started episode eight of the thirteen-episode serial. Season four was in the middle of its plot, showing every week and every week without fail, the family went to Xisuma's house to watch it; apart from last week when an emergency foster care placement was needed. Two young girls aged three and five.

They only stayed for two nights.

Because of filming, Jimmy and Tango barely spoke.

-

That night, Jimmy tossed and turned in his bed unable to fall asleep. His pillows were bricks and his duvet was suffocating. Jimmy took his duvet off but the autumn chill made him cold. He groaned in frustration and got out of bed, heading to the window and pulling back the curtain so he could see outside. There were no moving cars on the road, only ones parked on the curb and in the driveways of other houses.

The living-room light was on in the house opposite, but that was the only sign of life on the street. It had just gone midnight and the world was dead, but Jimmy was awake.

He walked away from the curtains and sat on his bed. His mind was clouded with exhaustion, but there were no signs of his sleepiness. It had been like this ever since his mother got out of prison.

There had been no contact, but that didn't mean Jimmy didn't worry about it.

Thoughts of her plagued him and he just couldn't fall asleep.

Luckily, he didn't have anything on tomorrow.

Jimmy reached for his phone and turned it on. He squinted in the bright light.

00:18 his time.

No one would be awake.

G would be asleep. Jimmy knew he had to wake up in two hours to start filming. A night scene on a roof that Jimmy wasn't needed for.

Martyn was working night shift in A&E.

Pearl, normally a night owl, had an important meeting tomorrow morning for work. Some sort of contract to renovate a lighthouse just off the coast? Whatever it was, she would be asleep.

Jimmy checked to see when Gem was last online. An hour ago.

He sighed. No one was there.

Then Jimmy remembered. Tango lived in Arizona. It was only four in the afternoon there. He pulled up their messages.

-

Jimmy: Hey

-

One minute went by.

-

Tango: Hey. You, ok?

Jimmy: Yeah.

Jimmy: Are you busy?

Tango: Just got home.

Tango: It's late where you are.

Jimmy: I know.

Tango: Sure you're ok?

Jimmy: Bad night

Tango: Want to talk about it?

Jimmy: Can I ring you?

-

He didn't know what had possessed him to ask.

-

Tango: Voice call only.

-

Jimmy took a shaky breath and pressed the call button. It barely rang at all before Tango picked up. He didn't know what to expect. "Hi." His voice was dryer than he'd realised. He put his phone on speaker and put it down so he could get a swig of water.

"Hey Jimmy." Tango said.

Jimmy blinked. His voice wasn't as he expected. It was rougher. Not that that was a bad thing. Just surprising.

Tango spoke again. "Bad dreams or couldn't sleep?"

Jimmy picked his phone up again. "Um, couldn't sleep." He could hear Tango doing something on the other end of the phone, but he couldn't make out what. "What are you doing?"

"Setting out my paints." Tango told him. "A little bit of design for my game."

He lay down on the brick pillow. "What game?"

"It's called Hungry Hermits," Tango said. "I can't say much more about it. You'll have to find when I'm done."

"M ok." Jimmy sighed a little. He wasn't tired yet, but his mind became calmer. It was like Tango was there with him. Jimmy wasn't alone anymore. He closed his eyes with that comfort in mind.

Tango continued to talk. “I should paint you a picture of the Dungeon Master. Your own personal copy.”

Jimmy smiled. “Sounds nice.”

“Yeah. Oh, a little birdy told me that Decked out three is in the works. Complete secret though. Only we know.”

Jimmy’s pillows weren’t brick anymore. “What about the creator?”

Tango chuckled. “One day I’ll tell you all my secrets.”

He smiled but didn’t know what that fully meant. “Tango?”

“Mm?” Tango hummed.

“Stay?” Jimmy asked him.

Tango didn’t hesitate. “Of course I will.”

It was ok. He wasn’t alone anymore. “You don’t have to talk the entire time.”

“I get it. I won’t go.” Tango told him. In the end, Tango talked about his day and stories about his co-workers and such. His stories calmed down once he noticed Jimmy had fallen asleep, but true to his word, Tango stayed on the call.

Jimmy buried his head in his pillow and fell into a dream. It started nice. Jimmy was at deep frost citadel, taking in the snow and ice. He turned and saw the dungeon master. The next second, the dungeon master had taken off his cloak to give it to Jimmy. He spoke with a rough voice. “You’re going to get cold.”

He put the coat on. It was warm like a hug. “Can I play the game?”

“Follow my lead.” The dungeon master led him into the citadel. “You know what to do.”

Jimmy stepped through the doors. The next second, he was in the dungeon, rounding the corners. He held the compass and map in his hand and sneaked around. He heard a noise and then pumped into a Ravenger.

However, it wasn’t a Ravenger. It was his mother, and they were at the old house. It smelt of spaghetti hoop and they were alone.
“Mum.”

“It’s all your fault, Jimmy.”

Jimmy stepped back. “Mum...”

“You should go to hell.” She came toward him.

Jimmy tripped over and he fell. He kept falling and falling and...

“Jimmy?” Tango. It was Tango.

Jimmy rubbed his face, his breathing quick.

“Jimmy, are you here with me?” Tango asked him.

It took a few seconds for Jimmy to realise Tango was talking to him.

What had just happened? His mum. Oh god his mum was coming to get him. Maybe she was in the house already. He didn’t want her there.

“Jimmy.” Worry seeped into Tango’s voice. “Jimmy, if you don’t tell me you’re ok, I’ll hack your phone and call your family.”

Jimmy sighed a shaky breath. “It’s all my fault.”

Tango was just glad Jimmy had answered him. “Uh? What’s your fault?”

“My mum.” He whispered.

“Ok.” Tango spoke softly. “You’re at home, safe.”

Jimmy sobbed. He didn’t know where it had come from, but it was there, and he hated it. What was even worse was that Tango was on the phone.

There was a pause before Tango spoke again. “Jimmy, what I need you to do, is send me someone’s phone number. Family or friend. Just someone close who can get to you quickly.”

He shook in his blankets as he cried. Jimmy didn’t really think about it, but he did what Tango said. He sent him his dad’s number. “I don’t want to bother him.”

“You won’t.” Tango said. “I’m going to have to disconnect to call, but I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

Jimmy didn't want him to go. He didn't want to be alone in the dark. "Ok."

"I'll be back." The sound cut off and Jimmy was left alone in the dark. Shadows crept up on him. Another sob broke from his lips and he got up to turn on the light. Why was he upset? His mum hadn't even been that bad. She had left them to their own devices and Jimmy thought that Martyn had done a pretty good job at keeping them safe.

His phone lit up at Tango called him a few minutes later.

Jimmy answered.

"Hey Jim. How are you holding up?" Tango asked him. "Your dad will be with you soon. Apparently, your sister's coming too. Didn't know you had a sister."

He wiped the tears away from his eyes and took his breath. "Have three." He whispered.

"Three? What are their names?" Tango asked.

Jimmy took another deep breath. "Gem, Pearl, Lizzie." Was Tango trying to distract him?

"That's pretty cool." Tango said. "You got any brothers?"

Jimmy nodded, forgetting Tango couldn't see. "Martyn, Grian."

"Pretty big family." Tango said lightly. "Are you still in the bedroom?"

Jimmy looked around. "Hmm." He hummed.

Tango spoke. "Can you go closer to the door? That way you can let them in?"

"They have a key." He whispered. Everything started to get a lot clearer. Jimmy could focus more on Tango's voice now. Damn. That had been a terrible dream. It didn't even seem like much, but the feelings he had felt. Like he'd been trapped.

"That's good." Tango's voice remained calm. "Hey, your dad sounds familiar."

Jimmy reached over to get a tissue. "He's from your state." He wiped his face with it.

Tango hummed. “Yeah, but it’s not just the accent. His voice is familiar.”

Jimmy shrugged. “I don’t know Tango.” He said.

“Least you’re responding a little more now.” Tango said after a moment. “Can’t lie, you worried me for a moment.”

Jimmy blinked. “Why?”

Tango made a strange noise. “Because I care about you? I know this is the first time we’ve spoken to each other like this, and I suppose we don’t know anything about each other, but I still care about you.”

Jimmy didn’t know what to say to that. “Can I see your painting?”

“Um, it’s nowhere near finished.” Tango put his camera on. It pointed to the table. There were paint supplies everywhere. “It’s just a background and some shadow at the moment.”

It was exactly that. Jimmy looked at it. “Looks warm.” He saw his face at the corner of his screen. Jimmy saw how red and tear-stained his face were. His eyes bloodshot. “I look a mess.”

“No, you don’t.” Tango flipped the camera, so it showed his face. “Look. Now we both have our faces.”

Jimmy hesitated. “Tango no!”

Tango smiled. “It’s alright Jimmy.” His hair was blond, a little darker than Jimmy’s. It was like fire. His eyes were a muted bluey-grey. He looked just like the Dungeon Master. Wait. Tango *was* the Dungeon Master. Of course! Jimmy was an idiot. Tango had told him this weeks ago! “I, you’re.” He took a breath. “The Dungeon Master.”

There was a glint in his eyes. “Yes, but we can talk about that later. I’m more concerned about you Jimmy.”

Jimmy swallowed. “But all that stuff I said.”

“Doesn’t matter.” Tango told him softly. “It’s ok.”

He looked away.

Tango took a breath. “Jimmy look. I don’t want to say too much, because you’re not in the right frame of mind. It doesn’t matter what you accidentally said to me. I didn’t mind. Anyway, not of that

matters. I realise none of this even makes sense. What I mean to say is, you are so beautiful." He cleared his throat. "That's all I'm going to say for now, but I thought you deserved to know, in case you didn't think you were."

Jimmy looked back at the screen. "Oh."

"Ok?"

Jimmy nodded. "Yeah." He heard the keys in the front door. "My dad's here."

"Ok." Tango smiled slightly. "Keep texting me, so I know you're ok."

"Yeah." Jimmy rubbed his eyes. "Can we u, call, tomorrow?"

"Of course." Tango told him.

They said goodbye. Jimmy hung up just as his dad and Gem came in.

Gem gave him a massive hug and Jimmy leant into it.

Impulse sat next to him. "What's up Jimmy?"

Jimmy couldn't answer. The night didn't seem real. It never did seem real. At least he was safe for now. Had Tango really said that to him?

No, he was probably still asleep.

-

The next morning, Jimmy woke tired. He sat up and reached for his phone. What had happened? Oh yeah. That.

Jimmy looked around for Gem and his dad.

Impulse was on a blow-up mattress on the floor. Gem must've been in the living room. Why did he need his dad to sleep by him? What on earth had happened last night?

His phone showed it was a little after nine in the morning. Jimmy had a few messages; a few from Tango and one from Scar. He clicked on Scar's first.

-

Scar: Hey Jim. Here's the first draft of the poster.

Attached was an image. Scar, as Hotguy in the middle, looking right at the camera. Cuteguy was on the left of him, pinkish lighting highlighting between the shadows. On the right was Jimmy. Darker lighting was cast upon him to show his role.

Scar: This one will come out once you're out at the villain!

Jimmy: It's great!

-

Jimmy turned in his bed. Why was he so tired?

He clicked on Tango's messages. It had been sent a few hours ago.

-

Tango: I'm going to go to bed.

Tango: But if you need me, call me. I'll have my phone on.

Tango: And tell me you're ok.

Tango: Sorry if I was a bit forward, calling you beautiful. The fact still stands though.

Jimmy: Hey, I'm ok. Don't worry about it. Pretty sure I've called you the same a few times.

Tango: That's good

Jimmy: Did I wake you up!!??

Jimmy: Sorry.

Tango: You did, but as I said. I left my phone on loud so I would wake if you needed me. Glad you're ok.

Jimmy: I'll let you sleep.

Tango: I'll speak later then x

-

A kiss!?

What was the world coming to!?

Jimmy sat up and took a deep breath. Was it bad that he couldn't remember what had happened last night after his dad and Gem came by?

Maybe.

He was too tired to care though.

Jimmy carefully slipped out of bed, feeling the carpet beneath his feet. He went downstairs and was greeted by the cats. They brushed against his legs and meowed. He bent down and stroked their fur before getting their breakfast.

It was going to be a long day.

January 2009

"Xisuma. Can I have a word?" Martyn gently opened the living room door. Jimmy was already in bed, and Peal and Grian were getting ready too. That left Martyn and Xisuma.

X put down his drink and smiled. "Of course."

Martyn came in and sat down on the sofa. He took a minute to figure out how he wanted to say this. "Can I move out? I'm sixteen now and." He kept his eyes on the floor. "There are a few reasons." Martyn cleared his throat. His hands were in fists, hidden inside his hoodie sleeves. "I think I need a bit more independence as me. I love my siblings with all my heart, but they're going to keep depending on me if I'm here."

Xisuma nodded. "That's understandable. How are you feeling?"

"Guilty. Like I'm abandoning them." Martyn said.

X came over to sit next to him but kept a space between them in case Martyn wanted it. "You're not abandoning them. You're giving both them and you space."

Martyn nodded. "They do those young people independent living places don't they?" He asked. "Like Uni halls."

"There's one not too far away from here I think." X said.

Martyn brightened up a little. “So, then I won’t be far from the kids.”

Xisuma smiled a little. “I’ll send them an email. See if there’s more information I can give you.”

“Thanks Suma.” Martyn relaxed. “Can I tell you the other reasons?”

Xisuma nodded. “Go ahead.”

He sat back in the sofa. “You see, they don’t really trust adults, and I know they’re warming up to you, but I just think it would help if I wasn’t here.”

“That makes a lot of sense.” Xisuma thought for a second. “For the record, you will always have a place here.”

Martyn smiled. “Thanks.” He got up. “Ima go up to my room now.”

“Alright. I’ll see you later.” Xisuma went back to his drink. It had gone a little cold, but it didn’t matter too much.

-

It was early Wednesday morning. Ready for the day, the children played in the front playground.

Jimmy sat by the gates with False. There had been a frost the night before, so the spiderwebs between the rails were icy white. It fascinated the pair.

“Do you think the spiders get cold?” False asked.

“Maybe.” Jimmy inspected the webs. “We can keep these ones safe.” Some of the other kids had been destroying the webs.

False nodded. “Yeah. They’re pretty.”

“I don’t want to!” A voice came from across the road.

Jimmy and False looked up. It was Gem and the tall man by a car. Most likely their car. Gem hadn’t gone to school the day before. They watched them.

The tall man ran his fingers through his hair. “I know Gem. You enjoyed yourself on Monday, didn’t you?”

Gem started to cry. “You were there.”

“I know.” The tall man seemed at a loss. “Can we try going through the gates?”

“But you’ll leave me there!” She cried.

False and Jimmy looked at each other. “She’s sad.” False said.

Jim nodded. “We should ask if she’s ok.”

“Yeah,” She agreed. Of course, they couldn’t do much at the moment until Gem and the tall man came through the gates. They weren’t allowed to leave without a trusted adult.

The tall man knelt down to her level. “Gemmy, I’ll be back to get after school has finished.”

“But, but what if you don’t?” Gem wiped her eyes. She hiccupped.

The tall man got out a clean tissue and wiped her eyes. “I need to go into the city this morning to sort out my passport.”

“Why?” She asked.

He gave her the tissue in case she still needed it . “You remember how we came to the UK very quickly?”

Gem nodded.

He continued. “I need to have a meeting with some people and fill out some paperwork so that everyone knows we live here now.”

“Oh.” Gem wiped her eyes again.

“Now, I thought it would be really boring for you.” He spoke. “I think you’ll have more fun here Gemmy. Look over there. There are the friends you met on Monday.”

Gem considered it.

Impulse smiled slightly. “Can you try for me? Until lunch.”

“I can call at lunch?” Gem asked.

He nodded. “Just go to reception at lunch. I’ll answer, and if you need me to pick you up, I will come.”

Gem thought for a minute and then she nodded. She took his hand.

“Ok.”

Impulse smiled wider and got up. “Do you remember what we have to do when we cross a road?”

“Look both ways.”

“Yes!” Impulse led her across the road and they got into the school.

Jimmy and False met them by the gate. “Gem!” Jimmy smiled. “You came back!”

Gem nodded. Her eyes were still red from crying, but they didn’t point it out.

False came up to her. “Have you seen the pretty spider’s webs?” She asked. “They have frost on them!”

She looked over at the fence. “Pretty. Impy look.”

“Oh yeah. That’s pretty cool.” Impulse followed their gazes.

The bell rang for the beginning of the day.

Gem looked up at Impulse with worry.

“It’s ok. Remember, you can ask to call me at lunchtime if you want to. I’ll be there to answer.” He said.

Gem nodded. “Bye.”

“I’ll see you later Gem.” He told her.

Gem looked at Jimmy and False.

Jimmy smiled. “This way Gem.” Together, the three of them walked to class.

-

Gem kept looking at the time. Although she couldn’t tell it Well, she knew that the little hand meant the hour.

“Where are you from?” Jimmy asked her. The class had to work with their table mates on a little project.

“Canada.” Gem answered.

Jimmy furrowed his brow. “Where’s Canada?”

Gem looked around. There was a map on the wall, so she went over and pointed. She had to get on her tippy toes to do so. “There.”

Jimmy and False looked. “Woah.”

“I’m from London.” False said. “But I had to move because my parents died.”

“Oh.” Gem said. She turned from the map. “I don’t have parents either.”

Jimmy tilted his head. “But that man.”

Gem shrugged. “Foster dad.”

His face brightened up a little.

False smiled. “Jimmy has a Foster dad too.”

One of the boys came over and laughed. “Jimmy’s a sissy who is only friends with sissy girls.” He made sure he was quiet about it, so the teacher didn’t hear them.

Gem frowned. “And you’re a sissy that’s scared of being friends with the kids with no parents.”

Jimmy giggled behind his hands.

The boy turned red. No one had ever spoken to him like that before. “At least my parents love me.” That was directed right at Jimmy.

He stopped giggling. Jimmy felt tears clouding his eyes. All three of them did. Everything had happened so recently for them all that it hurt.

“My parents love me.” False muttered.

Mrs. Norris looked over. “What’s going on over there?”

Billy, the boy, smiled sweetly. “Nothing Miss. Just saying hello to Gem.”

When Mrs. Norris turned away, Gem stamped on his foot.

Billy yelped. “Miss! Gem stamped on my foot!”

The teacher came over. “Alright. Gem, False, Jimmy, can I have a word outside please?”

“He should be sent out! Not us! He was picking on us!” False exclaimed.

“Out.” Mrs. Norris said and followed them out.

False crossed her arms. “He always picks on Jim.”

Mrs. Norris nodded. “I know.”

Gem stayed at the back. She hated the shouting.

“False, it’s ok.” Jimmy whispered.

“No, it’s not!” False said, tears falling down her face. “It’s not fair. He has everything. He has his mum and dad, and they love him. I know cus I’ve seen them in the park playing.”

Mrs. Norris tried to keep her voice calm. “False. You don’t know what other people are going through. It’s bad to make assumptions about other people’s situations.”

“No! No! It’s not fair!”

The teacher let her get on with it and turned to Gem. “Alright. Gem. It’s wrong to hurt other people.”

She nodded and looked at the floor.

Jimmy looked at his best friends. This wasn’t right. “But Billy hurt us.”

“I’m going to talk to him Jimmy.” Mrs. Norris said.

“When?” He asked.

“Later.” Mrs. Norris said.

Jimmy took a deep breath and spoke. Just like his siblings had taught him too. “No. Now.”

“I don’t like your tone young man.” She said.

He gave her a hard stare. As much of a hard stare that a six-year-old could muster. “Now.”

“I will call your Foster Father.” Mrs. Norris said.

Jimmy nodded. “Yep.”

“Ok, I will.” Mrs. Norris went to the class next door if the teacher there could keep an eye on her class. “We’re going to the office, and I will call all your legal guardians.”

Gem wiped her eyes. “But Impy’s not back until Lunch.”

“Then I will call him at lunch.” She spoke. She made the three of them sit silently in the office.

Jimmy played with his sleeves. False sat as still as a statue, eyes on the carpet. Gem bounced her leg. She felt sick to her stomach.

Were they in trouble?

Was everyone going to hate them?

Were they going to get kicked out because their care givers were disappointed in them?

Jimmy made a plan in his head. If they were kicked out, they could find a tunnel to sleep under so that it wouldn’t snow on top of them. They could learn to fish and made fire to cook it on. They’d be ok.

It felt like hours had gone by. Mrs. Norris could only get a hold of Xisuma as False’s aunt was at work.

About half an hour after the call, Xisuma was there. “Hello Jimmy.” He greeted Jimmy before the teachers.

Jimmy smiled a little, but it faded quick.

“What happened?” X asked.

Mrs. Norris opened her mouth to answer.

“With all due respect, I was asking the children.” Xisuma said.

Jimmy sat up a little. He told X everything as best he could.

Xisuma listened and nodded. “Thank you for telling me Jimmy. I’m going to have a quick word with Mrs. Norris outside.” He went out the office and the teacher followed, shutting the door behind them.

Jimmy looked at his friends and at once, the three of them went to the door and listened, their ears glued to it.

Chapter End Notes

I changed the chapter count from 15 to 16 cus there is so much to add to this story lol

As I disclaimer, I am trying to make this story very true to real life. This doesn't include Gem and Impulse's story because it probably isn't legal to live abroad with a foster child.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Gem found Jimmy in the kitchen. She had her hands in her hoodie pockets. “Hey.”

Jimmy looked up from his phone. “Hi.” He went onto Scar’s messages and pulled up the poster. “Look, Gem.”

Gem took the phone and smiled. “That’s so cool.” She passed it back to Jim.

He took it back and put it in his pocket.

“How are you doing?” Gem asked him.

Jimmy shrugged. “Alright.”

She nodded and sat at the table. “So, your mum’s out of prison.”

“Yeah.” Jimmy went to the kitchen window and opened the blinds. “It was going to happen, eventually.”

Gem nodded. “You had a full-blown panic attack about it last night.”

“Are you ever scared your biological parents are going to come out of prison?” He asked her.

She thought about it. “Realistically, they’re only going to come out of prison if they escape.” Gem paused and thought more about it. “A little. But I know I’m a thousand miles away and safe.” She was happy with her answer.

Jimmy came to sit down by his sister. “I know logically I won’t see her again. It’s just those childhood fears.”

“Are you still going to therapy?” She asked.

Jimmy nodded. “Yeah.”

Gem wasn’t convinced. “Ok. Well, you should definitely talk about this next time you see him.”

“I will.” Jimmy promised. “There’s something I need to talk to you about.”

Gem nodded, listening.

Jimmy took his phone out of his pocket. “You know that friend I made online. He called Dad.”

“Yeah?”

He continued. “We’ve been joking around for a while. You know when you flirt with your friends sometimes. At first, I thought it was just that. I sent him a picture of me and the cats, and he said my eyes were a pretty colour, and then last night, he said I was beautiful.” Jimmy paused to think about it. “I don’t know if it was to take my mind off last night or not.”

“Right.” Gem got up to get herself a glass of water.

“This morning, I saw he said he meant it. Funny thing is, the Dungeon Master from Decked Out was based on him, and I’ve said multiple times that he was hot. To his face.” Jimmy sat in his chair.

Gem sat back down. “That’s cool. About the Dungeon Master.” She thought about it. “So, you think he’s pretty?” Gem smirked slightly.

Jimmy huffed. “Yes.”

“Do you want something with him?” She asked.

He shrugged. “I don’t know, Gem.”

She sipped her water. “Think you’re mentally stable enough for it?”

“When am I ever mentally stable?” Jimmy asked.

“True.” Gem took another drink. “If you want to go for it, do it. What is there to lose?”

He wanted to. He really did. “I don’t want to lose my friend.”

Gem understood that. “It’s a risk that you’re going to have to take.”

“What do I even say?” He asked.

“Call him. Tell him that he’s pretty or handsome or whatever. One of them will work.” Gem told him.

Jimmy nodded. “Thanks Gem.” He put his phone away again. There was no point in waking Tango up again. “Do you have work?”

She looked at the time. “Yeah, but I told them I’d work from home today.”

“Alright.” He paused for a moment. “You and Dad aren’t going to leave me alone today, are you.” It was a statement.

“Not a chance.” Gem stood. “I’m going to shower.”

Jimmy nodded and watched her go. He got out his phone and scrolled through Twitter to like some posts. More fanart and some theories. Some were interesting, so he sent them to Scar.

-

That afternoon, he rang Tango as soon as he knew he would be awake. Jimmy waited for him to answer.

Tango answered and turned it onto face cam. “Hey.”

Jimmy saw his face and his own lit up. There was something so, magical about him. Not because of the Dungeon Master, but because of the blue colour of Tango’s eyes. His smile. His voice. “Hi.”

“How are you doing?” Tango asked.

“Ok I think.” Jimmy said. “How are you?”

The worry lifted from his face. “I’m ok thanks.”

Jimmy sat there for a moment.

“Not that I’m not glad you called, but why?” Tango asked.

Did he say? How did he say it? “Tango, when we flirt with each other, and say the other is handsome or something.” He cleared his throat. “What does it mean?”

Tango’s face turned into something that Jimmy didn’t recognise, but his eyes had softened. “I don’t know. We don’t really know each other, and it’s not like we can take a short drive to see each other. Normally, these things start with a date.”

Jimmy’s heart sped up. “Bit of a trek to Arizona.” He joked. “But. I would like to know you more. I, I like you. I want to like you more.”

Tango grinned. “Really?”

Jimmy nodded.

“I like you too,” Tango told him. “And I would love to get to know you.”

A flush painted his face. “Do you um, have work today?”

“No, not today.” Tango sat himself on the sofa and slumped, so he was laying down. He took a cushion and put it under his head. “Now that the difficult talkification is over for now, we can just, talk.”

Jimmy lay on his bed. He didn’t know what Gem and his dad were doing downstairs, but he had told them he wanted a bit of time alone. “Have you ever done a self-portrait?”

“You’ve seen them.” Tango said.

“But they’re the Dungeon Master.” Jimmy told him.

Tango nodded. “Yeah, and the Dungeon Master is me with blue hair.” He spoke. “But no, I’ve not painted any self-portraits otherwise.”

“Shame.” Jimmy said. “Do you do commissions?” A grin slowly rose on his face.

Tango snorted. “Kind of, but it’s mostly for the games I make.”

“How many games have you made?” Jimmy asked.

Tango closed his eyes and hummed in thought. “A few.”

Jimmy went onto google. Tango’s picture was gone from the screen, but he could still hear him. “Do you have a wiki page? Ima look you up. Tango Tek, right?”

“Mmhmm.” Tango sounded amused.

He found a wiki page that seemed to be Tango’s. There were about two sentences of information and then a list of games he had made. “Woah, you’ve done a lot.”

“That’s just the ones I’ve released into the public.”

Jimmy read through them. “Boom Box? I’ve heard of that.” He continued. Jimmy paused. “Tango!”

“What?” Tango laughed a little.

He turned back to the video call. Jimmy sat up straight. “You made Decked Out!”

“Yep.” Tango looked as if he was enjoying the moment thoroughly.

“Oh my god! Oh my god! My boyfriend’s a genius!” The words slipped from his mouth before he could stop them. Jimmy sat there a little mortified.

A blush rose on Tango’s cheeks. “Boyfriend?”

“Um.” Jimmy was lost for words. “That slipped out.”

“It’s ok.” Tango’s smile softened. “One day, I promise. Once we get to know each other.”

Jimmy nodded.

“Don’t be embarrassed. It’s cute that you’re excited.” Tango told him.

“Thanks.” Jimmy smiled a little.

The two of them talked for hours about a vast range of topics, from what the weather was like where they were, to talking about fantasy and video games.

Impulse knocked on the door and game in. “Jimmy, did you want any dinner?”

Jimmy looked at the time. “Oh, I forgot to make food.”

“It’s fine, I did.” He told him.

Jimmy nodded. “Alright. Tango, I’ll speak to you later.”

“Ok Jim.” Tango said. “See you.”

Jimmy terminated the call and looked up at his dad.

“I heard you laughing.” Impulse smiled.

“Yeah.” Jimmy put his phone down and drank some water. “Tango was telling me a funny story.” He got up and followed him down to the kitchen. Jimmy had to admit that after talking and laughing with Tango, he felt a tiny bit better, even though he still felt he was

drowning.

January 2009

If there was one thing the three children were grateful for, was that Xisuma never raised his voice once. They were all accustomed to adults shouting, whether at them or other people, and all three hated it.

“How long have you known that Jimmy was getting bullied?” Xisuma asked calmly.

Mrs. Norris hesitated and answered. “The knowledge was passed on to me by his reception teacher last year.” She spoke.

“And after Jimmy was placed under my care, you didn’t think that I should’ve known about this?” X spoke.

“His siblings knew.” Was her answer.

There was a long pause. “His siblings are children who are also placed under foster care.” Xisuma could’ve said a lot more, but he didn’t want to release too much of the children’s privacy. “I should’ve been informed, so this could’ve been dealt with months ago.”

“I assumed they would’ve told you.” Mrs. Norris said.

“It is your job as their teacher to relay this kind of information to their parents or legal guardians. I have another question. I understand the teasing and the bullying doesn’t stop at this one boy, but the whole class. Have any of these children been talked to and educated?”

Mrs. Norris didn’t quite know what to say.

Xisuma nodded. “I see. Maybe you should have a lesson on bullying. Even better, a lesson where you educate about all family situations, whether that be foster care, adoption, or living with a relative. You could go a step further and educate about having two mothers or fathers.”

“Unfortunately, it’s not part of the curriculum.” Mrs. Norris said.

“Then as a licensed foster carer, I would be happy to give a talk about foster families.” X suggested.

Mrs. Norris didn't speak for a moment. "I will bring it up at the next staff meeting."

"Meanwhile, I would like you to talk to the children about this. If not, send a letter to the parents so they can talk to them. I want Jimmy to see that an adult can be trusted and do what they need to do to promise his safety." X said. He tried to think of anything else. He couldn't. Anything else could be put into an email.

Xisuma headed to the office and all three kids rushed back to their seats so they wouldn't get caught. "How are you three doing?"

They nodded.

Jimmy wiped his eyes. Suma had stood up for him. He knew he was kind, and he knew they were kind of a family now, but it just surprised them.

"Jimmy, would you like a hug?" X asked the little boy.

Jimmy nodded and hugged him tight.

"I need to get back to class." Mrs. Norris said. "I will have a talk with the children."

Xisuma was a little confused about why she was leaving three children with a random man. Yes, it would have been fine if it had been Jimmy, but he didn't really know False and the other girl that well. "Is someone else coming to supervise?"

"You're DBS checked." She spoke. "I can't leave them here, and the receptionist is on her break." She left them.

They watched her go.

"I don't think she knows what she's doing." False said.

X smiled but didn't say anything, even though he agreed with her. "False; your auntie is working today, isn't she?"

"Yeah, she works every day." She told him.

He turned to Gem. "You must be Gem."

Gem just nodded.

"Nice to meet you. I'm Xisuma." He smiled. X could see she was

uncomfortable, so he talked to Jimmy. He couldn't leave the kids on their own either, and it was a bad idea to walk around in a school to try and find someone.

A bit of time went before Mrs. Norris came back. The bell had rung for lunch. "Alright, now I should be able to get a hold of your family's, Gem and False.

Gem sat up. "Can I talk to Impy?"

"No sweetheart." She spoke. "Only adults can use the phone." Mrs. Norris rang Impulse who said he would be there soon.

"Could you tell Mrs. Symmetry that I can take False if she can't." X asked.

Mrs. Norris rang and relayed the message. She passed the phone to X who took it. "Yes, I'm already here to take Jimmy back. Yes, I can take her. I can cook her dinner too. Alright, I'll see you later."

Jimmy grinned. "Falsey's coming for dinner!?"

"False is coming for lunch too." Xisuma told him.

False smiled. "Yay."

Xisuma came over. "Right, I need to see if Pearl and Grian want to come home early too."

"I can get them." Jimmy said.

He nodded. "Alright, you do that Jim. Then we can go."

The boy hesitated. "Can we wait until Gem's foster dad gets her? I don't want her to be by herself."

"Of course." X sat down.

False and Gem stood. They wanted to go with Jimmy on their little adventure to find Pearl and Grian. Eventually, the three ran off.

Xisuma was left with the teacher. So, Gem was in foster care too. "Did you talk to the class?"

"Um, no." She spoke. "Unfortunately, a matter arose."

X wasn't pleased. "We will wait here until Gem's foster carer arrives."

It didn't take long for Impulse to arrive. He had been close by when he had received the call. X stood before Mrs. Norris. "Hello, you're Gem's foster carer, aren't you?"

Impulse was a little confused. "Yes?"

"I'm Jimmy's foster dad." He spoke. "Xisuma Void."

Impulse nodded. "Impulse." He said. "What's going on?"

"I just needed you to know that the teacher responsible for them left your foster daughter in the care of a complete stranger. Me, whilst she went back to teaching instead of calling another member of staff." X told him.

Impulse narrowed his eyes a little. "I see."

Mrs. Norris sneaked out.

"What happened?" Impulse asked. "She didn't give me much information."

X realised she had gone and sighed. "Some of the kids were picking on Jimmy, Gem and False because they're the only ones without parents to look after them. From what they told me earlier. I don't believe it's going to be sorted out either. All three of them were upset when I arrived."

"Right." Impulse rubbed his face. "Ok." He realised he didn't really know anyone here. "You said you were Jimmy's foster dad?"

Xisuma nodded.

"Can I have your contact details?" He asked. "Only, I've just moved here so I don't know anyone. I only have a few social workers numbers and that's it."

X agreed and they exchanged numbers.

Impulse carried on speaking. "I just need to say. Jimmy was so kind to Gem and I'm so grateful."

Xisuma smiled. "I'm glad. He's an amazing person."

The children came back; Pearl and Grian along with them.

Xisuma went to them. "Ready to go?" he asked them.

Gem saw Impulse. “Impy!” She ran to him. “Can we go back?”

“Yes, we can go back.” He hugged her close.

The seven of them walked to the carpark and got into their respective cars.

“What’s going on, Suma?” Pearl asked.

Xisuma put the keys in the car. “Something happened in Jimmy’s class today and it turns out it’s been happening for a long while. Do you mind if we have a conversation about it after lunch?”

The twins gave each other a look.

“No one’s in trouble.” X added.

Pearl nodded. “Ok.” She didn’t sound like she believed that.

X drove the children home and helped the younger two out of the car. “Let’s make lunch together.”

“Can we have a picnic?” Jimmy asked.

Xisuma got them inside. “Of course we can. It would have to be indoors since it’s too cold outside, but we can move the coffee table out of the way and eat on the living room floor. I think I even have a picnic blanket somewhere.”

The kids put their school bags by the door and took their shoes off.

“Don’t forget to wash your hands.” He said as he hooked his coat. Xisuma met them in the kitchen. “Alright.” They were nervous. He needed to make this fun. X got out his phone. “Pearl, did you want to choose a song?”

A small smile rose on her face. “Arms of Gold please.”

He searched for it. “I’ll make the sandwiches. Grian, you’re in charge of the dips. We have some cucumber and carrots in the fridge that can be cut up into some sticks and we have plenty of dips and sauces too.”

The boy grinned. He got to use knives which was exciting.

“Pearl, you are in charge of the drinks.” He told her.

Pearl nodded.

“Jim and False, you’re in charge of the crisps and dessert. You can use the plastic bowls to put them in. There’s plenty of stuff in the snack cupboard.” X smiled and turned the music on. This wouldn’t take long, but it should be fun. You could make a lot of things fun with a bit of effort.

The music started and they all got to their jobs.

X made a choice of ham or cheese sandwiches and cut them up into triangles. He organised them so all the ham were on one plate, and all the cheese were on the other, like at parties.

Grian chopped the carrots and cucumber and squeezed some BBQ sauce and tomato ketchup into separate bowls.

Jimmy and False did the same with cheese and onion crisps and some brownie bites from Tesco’s.

Pearl poured some juice into some cups, put a splash of water with it and added lemonade. She called them cocktails.

Soon enough, the picnic was ready to eat. X moved the coffee table and got the blanket to put on the floor.

The kids went upstairs and got their teddies. It was not a teddy bear’s picnic. Jimmy lent False Woody.

Together, they laid the food out on the floor, although the drinks had to stay on the coffee table. They were liable to spill otherwise.

X put some more music on in the background and they ate and laughed.

Once the food had been eaten, they cleaned the kitchen up. It didn’t take too long.

It was time to have the talk.

X sat down.

Jimmy sat beside him. “I don’t want to talk about it Suma.” He leant into his foster dad.

“I know Jim.” He said. “We can save it for another day, but I just need to know that you’ll be ok at school.”

Jim buried his face. “I will.”

Suma looked over at the twins. “What do you two think?”

Grian shrugged. “We do what we can. The Adults don’t care about us. They just feel sorry for us because we’re here. They never listen to anyone if they’re getting bullied.”

X nodded. “I see. I might have to write to the Board of Governors.” He wrapped his arm around Jimmy. “I’ll email them now. Why don’t you four find something to do. You don’t have to leave the room if you don’t want to, but if you want to go outside, tell me, and don’t forget to wrap up warm.”

They nodded.

“Suma, can we go to a book shop?” Pearl asked.

He smiled. “Of course. We can go after I’ve finished writing this email. Sound good?”

Pearl nodded. “Thanks.”

The children decided to go upstairs for a bit whilst X turned on his computer and looked up the email for the Board of Governors. His phone quietly pinged a message, and he looked.

-

Unknown Number: Hi, It’s Impulse. Gem’s foster dad.

-

X saved his number

-

Xisuma: Hello.

-

X turned to his computer and wrote the email.

-

Dear Madam or Sir,

I am a concerned carer of three children at the school you Goven, and I must say that I am disappointed at the way this place is run...

-

Xisuma had a frown on his face as he wrote it. He checked it over twice and set it off, hoping to get a reply soon. X picked up his phone and texted Impulse.

-

Xisuma: I've sent an email to the board of Governors about this.

Impulse: What are your plans if this doesn't work?

Xisuma: I'll probably move the kids to a better school.

Impulse: understandable, for the kids sakes.

Xisuma: How is Gem?

Impulse: Alright. Watching a DVD at the moment. How's Jimmy?

Xisuma: He's ok.

-

X stood up. He remembered something he had wanted to do since Impulse had told him how kind Jimmy had been. He went upstairs and knocked on the door. "Jimmy?" He opened it and came in. Jimmy and False had been making things with Lego. "I just need to say something." He sat down with them. "Impulse, you know Gem's Foster dad, said how kind you were to Gem when she first arrived. I just wanted to say that I'm very proud of you."

Jimmy nodded. Tears welled up in his eyes and he scooted over to hug his foster dad.

Xisuma held him close. "I'm so so proud of you for being so kind and a good friend." He ran his fingers through the boys hair. X looked at False. "And I'm proud of you False too. I'm proud of both of you for being good friends to each other, and being kind to other people.

False grinned.

"Lets go to the bookshop shall we? I'll buy you all a book each." He smiled.

Jimmy let go of the hug and stood up, wiping his eyes. Normally, he'd be worried about crying in front of an adult, but he knew it was ok. "Book for Martyn too?"

"Yes, we'll get a book for Martyn." X said. "You two go down and and get your shoes and coats on." He went to the twins room and knocked on their door. He told them that they were going to the bookshop. Together, they went downstairs.

"Can we get a book for Gem too?" Jimmy asked.

X nodded. "Of course." He helped the younger ones into the car and drove them into town to a nice quiet bookshop he knew about.

They spent a lot of time looking for books. They went to the kids section. False and Jimmy looked at all the books they could, like, 'The Tiger who came to tea', and 'the Gruffalo.' There were quite a few 'Rainbow Magic' faerie books too.

Pearl smiled seeing them. "I used to have 'Pearl the cloud fairy'."

False and Jimmy tried to looked for their's and Gem's names but they couldn't find one. That was until Grian spotted a 'Gem' faerie book. Gem the puppy faerie. Jimmy took it out of the shelf and gave it to X. "This one is for Gem."

Jimmy liked the sound of 'The Gruffalo' so added that to his list.

False picked out one of the 'Mog books'.

Xisuma hadn't thought about 'Mog' for a long while.

"Suma, what's this one?" Pearl held up 'Matilda.'

He looked at it. The thing about a book like that, it could go one of either two ways. Pearl might relate to it, and make her feel like she wasn't alone, which was preferred, or she could feel worse by reading it. "It's about a little girl who discovers she has powers. Unfortunately, her parents don't really care about her and her head teacher is a bully. Matilda does have a happy ending though."

Pearl sighed. "Why are all the stories about children with parents who don't love them?"

"I think it's to help people understand. It might help children who read it that they're not alone and there's always a chance to find

someone who will look after and love them.” He said.

Pearl thought for a moment. “How does it end?”

“Her teacher adopts her.” X paused. “There’s a film we can watch to see if you want to read the book. We can come back to it later.”

Pearl nodded and put the book back. She settled for ‘The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe.’

Grian picked up the first ‘Harry Potter’ book. He’d always liked Harry Potter. He then picked out an anime book. One of the ‘Naruto’ series.

X quickly got himself a book. He already knew which one he wanted. He paid for the books and took them home, letting the children play whilst he did some work in the living room.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all your love.

Can anyone guess why Impy and Gem came to the UK?

So basically what I do, is that I don't post the next chapter until I have finished writing the one after, and I think it's a good system becuase I get excited and want to post the chapter before to show you.

This means I can give you a sneaky peak for the next chapter. So I feel like the slow burn is starting to get a little too slow. At the moment, our Ranchers are just sitting on the fense between dating and not, and that needs to change ASAP, just so we have plenty of time for them to be utterly adorable :))

Also right, after the next chapter, so chapter eleven onwards, I'll be doing more time skips within the life of little Jimmy. Just some major points, becuase at some point I realised I had more content for little Jimmy than I did for present Jimmy.

Whilst that's not terrible, I want at least 1000 words for each section.

Talking about words, next chapter is about 5000 words :))

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jimmy: Hey. I know I'm not supposed to show anyone, but here's the poster for my show.

Tango: You're playing a Villian?

Jimmy: Yee.

Tango: It's a hot look on you ;]

Jimmy: Thanks heheh

Tango: What are you doing atm?

Jimmy: Just packing up from filming. Was filming some flashback scenes for season six.

Tango: But you're only on season 5?

Jimmy: Scar had visions, lol

Tango: I see

Jimmy: Can we call when I get home?

Tango: Of course xx

Jimmy: Yay 😊

-

Jimmy hopped on the train, headphones in and backpack over one shoulder. He found a seat by the window and sat. The train doors beeped open and closed for the next few minutes whilst more passengers got on before the locomotive pulled away from the station.

He leant his head against the window. The sun had begun to sink behind the London skyline. The tree's had not long since turned a vivid of colours; all types of browns, reds, oranges and yellows. The city looked as if it were on fire.

-

Jimmy: The autumns so pretty.

Tango: It's not started here yet. Forgot you guys called it autumn.

Jimmy: Sorry, fall.

Jimmy: Why fall?

Tango: I dunno? Falling leaves?

Jimmy: So imaginative

Tango: Yeah, like you and all your Britishness.

Tango: I can't think of literal meaning words you have

Tango: Maybe we have a problem

Jimmy: Sidewalk

Jimmy: Hehe

Tango: Why a Zebra Crossing!??

Jimmy: Looks like a zebra!!!

-

Jimmy silently giggled at their conversation.

-

Tango: See! That's as bad as leaves falling.

Tango: Hang on. I'm going to look at a website.

Jimmy: Alright. Tell me when you get to the rubber. Hehehe

Tango: !?

Jimmy: Eraser lol.

Jimmy: Also, what the hell is a fanny pack? It's a bum bag.

Tango: It doesn't go over your bum!

Jimmy: It doesn't go over your fanny either.

Tango: I don't have one of those!

Jimmy: Good to know. LMAO

-

A small smile stayed painted on his lips as he put his phone in his lap and stared out of the window, watching the last of that day's sunlight go.

Soon enough, he arrived at the train station. The train pulled up, and he stepped off with the other passengers. He got on the bus and travelled the last minutes of his journey before he was safely home. Jimmy dropped his stuff on the floor and went to the kitchen to fill up the cat's water bowl. He found them both asleep on the sofa, curled up together.

Once everything was locked up, he called Tango. The screen lit up as the other man answered the call, and Jimmy got the pleasant view of his face. Damn, he was so cute. "Hey."

"Hey Jimmy." Tango smiled. He was walking through a hallway.

Jimmy tried to get a clue as to what he was doing. "What are you doing?"

"Putting away my workout thingies." He smiled. Tango turned the camera to show the bag he was carrying.

Jimmy grinned. "You work out?"

Tango turned the camera back to him. "Yep."

"That's cool." He sat back. "I used to but," Jimmy paused. He didn't know why he had stopped working out. "I just lost motivation, I suppose."

Tango smiled sadly. "I hope you find motivation again."

Jimmy nodded. "Yeah." He lost focus for a moment and gazed into space. Why did every conversation have to go back to him being, *Sad*? "Anyway." He brought himself back to the room.

"Filming fun?" Tango asked.

“Yeah. It’s always fun. Even more fun that I get to work with my brother and his friends.” Jimmy told him.

Tango found somewhere to sit. “It does sound fun.”

Jimmy shifted. “How’s Decked Out?” His grin came back. “Can we play some?”

“You can if you want to.” Tango said. “I need to work on something, but I don’t mind if we’re still on call. It’ll make it less tedious.”

Though a little disappointed he couldn’t play with Tango, he was glad he still got to talk to him. He went to his computer and turned it on. Jimmy loaded up the game and the familiar ‘Decked Out’ soundtrack came on.

“Have you found out any of the secrets?” Tango asked.

“Um.” Jimmy pulled up the achievement menu. “I’ve found a few Easter eggs. Pearl said there’s a lot on Level four though.”

Tango pulled out his laptop so he could start working. “Pearls your sister.”

“Yep. Oldest sister.” Jimmy turned off the enchantments. “She beat the game.”

Tango typed his password in. “As far as I know, not many people have achieved that.”

Jimmy looked at his deck of cards. “Pearl’s good at games.”

“I’m glad I have two fans.” He huffed a laugh.

“Tango Decked Out is the number two seller over here.” Jimmy looked at his phone, frowning. “However, I am your number one Decked Out fan.”

Tango smiled. “Thanks Jim.”

Jimmy went back to his game and walked his character into the dungeon. “Into the cart and down into the dungeon.” He smiled.

Tango pulled up a Word document and started to type.

“Ok, going quiet.” He sneaked into the cave. “Level four. Perfect.”

“Going in hard.” Tango said.

Jimmy snorted. “I can do level three pretty well now. I just keep dying on level four.”

“You’ll get there.” Tango kept typing.”I have faith.”

Jimmy didn’t answer right away. He’d seen a Ravenger. “Thanks.” He sneaked around it. “A key. Nice.”

They were quiet for a few minutes, just doing their own thing. It didn’t matter. They knew the other was there.

“Is there any canon lore for Dungeon Master?” Jimmy asked as he escaped through the doors of level two.

Tango made a noise. “Yes actually. Depends on how much you want spoiled for Decked Out three.”

Jimmy stretched his fingers and let his character rest between levels. “I could ask questions about him?”

“Yeah, that works.” Tango cleared his throat.

He made his way deeper into the dungeon. “Does he have a first name?”

“I don’t know, he’s just the Dungeon Master.” Tango said.

Jimmy grinned. “So, Tango?” He jumped over some lava. “Is he always alone?”

There was a pause as he thought. “He has the Revengers and the Wardens. The lost souls who wander in.”

“So, no husband he goes home to? A ranch a thousand miles away, and they write love letters every night.” Jimmy jumped into the lake and onto the pirate ship.

Tango hummed. “I mean I probably won’t put that in the game but it can be cannon if you want it to.”

Jimmy grinned. “That’s all I need.” He swam away from Willie. “I just don’t want him to be lonely.”

Tango pulled up another Word document. “I could make a mini-game set in the same universe. Not Decked Out, but it could be a little

Easter egg at the end."

"How did they fall in love?" Jimmy asked.

"He stumbled upon the citadel, looking for a goat, but this type of goat only lived in the icy depths where Decked Out was," Tango typed as he spoke. "He went inside, freezing cold, and asked to stay the night. The Dungeon Master agreed, but he had to escape the dungeon."

Jimmy found the key to the next level and went through the door. He added to Tango's story. "So, he went down. He was scared at first, especially of the creatures in the dungeon. But halfway down, he noticed one of the Ravenger's had got stuck in a wire. He was going to run, but his heart told him to help."

Tango continued to write. "Don't get your face eaten."

"I'll try not to." Jimmy reached level three and snuck in the dark, careful not to make a single noise. "He got the Revenger unstuck."

Tango nodded. "And for a moment, he thought he was going to get eaten, but he didn't. The Dungeon Master watched the whole thing."

Jimmy was quiet for a moment. "Is it too soon to fall in love?"

"I think the Dungeon Master would fall fast after seeing him look after something he cared about," Tango thought. "I never said it would be a *healthy* love, Jimmy."

"But can it be a soft one?" He asked.

Tango nodded, forgetting Jimmy couldn't see him too well. "Yes, ok, we can make it a soft love. It can grow to become a healthy one, but it won't begin like that. The man's been alone for years."

"But his Rancher can help." Jimmy opened a chest and found treasure.

"Yes." Tango said softly. "His Rancher can help him learn to love properly." There was a sweeter pause between them as Tango wrote their ideas down. "Alright. I can't promise it will happen, but it's a sweet idea.

Jimmy smiled. He fell to level four. "Ok, I need to concentrate hard now."

“You on level four?” Tango asked, going back to his original document.

“Yup.” Jimmy sneaked around the corner. “Ah here. The artifact.” He smiled. “Let’s get this back home.”

Tango glanced at the phone screen. “Sure, you don’t want to explore?”

Jimmy made a face. “Once I know I can make it out alive. I want to appreciate this work of art you’ve created.”

“I wouldn’t say ‘work of art.’ There’s a lot of improvements needed.” Tango said.

Jimmy ran up to the exit. “Means next one will be even better. Stop being so hard on yourself. This is amazing.”

Tango made a noise. “If you say.”

“As your Rancher, I say that it’s amazing.” Jimmy told him.

“Oh, so *You’re* my Rancher, are you?” He teased.

Jimmy grinned. “Yep. If you’ll have me.”

“Of course I want you.” Tango shut his computer down and picked his phone up so he could see Jimmy’s face. He was concentrating on the game.

Jimmy choked on air and almost walked into a Warden. “Wanting me and having me are two very different things.”

Tango scooted down, so he was lying. “I’ll have you. I want you. I have you.”

He doubted he was going to win this game.

“Three very different things if you ask me.” Tango continued. “And all true.”

Jimmy just about made it through level three. “Thought we were getting to know each other.”

Tango didn’t take his eyes off his face. “I think sometimes my heart speaks instead of my head. It’s annoying. Logically, I know we should take it slow and get to know each other. That’s what would be good

for the both of us."

"But your heart wants to go straight into it." Jimmy nodded. "I get that."

Tango didn't talk for a minute. He was thinking about what to say; which feelings to listen to and which to push down. "What do you think about this, Jimmy? I love the idea of us, and I know we're probably just being young and stupid, but." He stopped.

Jimmy pressed pause on the game and picked his own phone up so he could look at him. "We're almost certainly being young and stupid." He stared into his eyes. They were a little Pixley through the phone; one of them probably had low internet, but Jimmy could still see the beautiful colour of them. "We can learn about each other whilst still having each other. Are, are you scared of making mistakes?"

Tango turned to his other side. "Perhaps."

Jimmy looked away for a second. "Mistakes are ok."

"I know that logically." He sighed. "Jimmy?"

He hummed in answer.

Tango waited a second. "Why are you so pretty?"

Jimmy flushed. "Genetics?"

"No, but *why* are you so pretty?" Tango almost whispered. "You're still a stranger. How is there a pull between us when we're five thousand miles away? We've not called that many times. We've not known each other long. I don't understand."

Jimmy was speechless. He sat back in his gaming chair. "Maybe we're just soulmates?" He offered partly as a joke.

"Maybe." Tango shrugged. "We can work with that." He sat up. "Because you're amazing, and I want to be yours."

He smiled. "Like proper boyfriends?"

"If you want," Tango said.

Jimmy nodded, grinning. "Please."

Tango moved to the other side of the sofa. "Good. That's sorted."

Jimmy laughed a little. “Yep.” He put his phone down and went back to the game. In reality, Jimmy wanted to roll on his back and kick his legs, giggling. “My Rancher?”

“That’s what we’re going with?” Tango smiled.

“Uh huh.” Jimmy got up to level two. “Damn, my clank is too high.”

Tango looked at the screen as if he could see the game. “Ah, you should run.”

“I’m on level two; the evil fairies are going to kill me!” Jimmy made his character run.

Tango moved, yet again. “Run Jimmy!” He laughed.

Jimmy ran as much as he could but got stabbed with tiny little evil fairy swords before he reached level one. “Damn I was so close.”

“You clankificated too much.” Tango grinned. “Stupid game.”

Jimmy laughed and reached for his phone. “Stupid, stupid game.”

Neither of them was serious. They ended up laughing for a short while before falling silent. Jimmy let out a breath and kept his eyes on the screen to look at Tango. “I don’t even think the game matters. You do.”

“Stop looking at me like that,” Tango told him, his voice still soft.

Jimmy tilted his head. “Like what?”

Tango moved his phone to his other hand. “Like I put the stars in the sky.”

“I’ve always loved the stars.” He told him. There was a look in his eyes.

The smallest smile rose on his face. “I need to get to work. I told them I needed the morning to myself, but I have a meeting this afternoon.”

Jimmy nodded. Tango had booked the morning off to talk to him. Oh gosh. “Alright. I’ll speak to you later. Text me when you’re there.”

“I will. See you, Jimmy.” Tango smiled and disconnected the call.

Jimmy took a deep breath and laid down on the floor, phone in hand.

It had been a hell of a day. Now he just wanted the quiet to wash over him. Whilst his mind was drowning in thunder clouds and rivers of tar, his heart was filled with something warm and fuzzy.

February 2009

Martyn came home from school and got into some more comfortable clothes, putting his uniform in the wash. He found the book on his bed and smiled a little. It would be something nice to look through later. Timmy's friend was over which was nice, but also a pain, because he had wanted to talk to him, Grian and Pearl about moving out. It would have to wait.

Xisuma made them Pasta and sausages for dinner. He gave everyone a bowl full and together; they sat around the table.

Jimmy and False got to play a little more before her aunt picked her up. They hugged and False left with her new book.

Martyn and Xisuma did the washing up, the latter washed whilst the former dried. "I'm going to tell them."

Xisuma looked at him. "About you moving?"

"Yeah." Martyn put a plate away. "I need to do it soon. Gives them time to get used to the idea, doesn't it."

X nodded. "Yes. Did you look at the places I recommended?"

"Yeah." Martyn dried a pan. "Can we have a look around a few of them? Together?"

X thought about it for a moment. "I'll send them an email. If you want, we could do it in school hours? Although you have your exams soon don't you. If not, I can see if the other's want to go around a friend's house."

"A weekend would be better." Martyn suggested. "But if you can't find anyone, then I can go by myself."

"You want me to go with you, so I'll go with you." They finished the dishes. "Do you want me there when you tell them?" Xisuma asked.

Martyn shook his head. "I think it's something I need to do alone."

X understood. He went to the snack cupboard and took out a bag of Magic Stars. “Take these up with you.”

Martyn took them. “Thanks.” He took a breath. “They’re never going to forgive me.”

“They will.” X said. “Give it some time. Once they understand that you’re not going far away, they’ll be fine with the idea.”

He opened the bag and ate one of the stars. “Alright. Wish me luck.” Martyn laughed nervously.

X laid a calm hand on the boy’s shoulder. “If you need me, come and get me.”

Martyn went upstairs, bag of chocolates in hand. He went to Jimmy’s room and reached for his hand. “Come with me Tim.”

Jimmy looked up from his game and nodded. He stood, grabbing Norman and took his brother’s hand.

Martyn took him to the twin’s room. He sat on Grian’s bed.

The three looked at him expectantly. Grian took a small handful of chocolate and stuffed them into his mouth. Pearl took a few and Jimmy did too. He fed one to Norman.

“I have something to tell you.” Martyn ate a chocolate himself. He finished it and continued. “I’m moving out soon. Soon ish. After I take my exams.”

The chocolate eating stopped.

“What?” Grian asked him. “Where are you going?”

Martyn put the packet beside him. “To a place. Not too far from here. Like a flat but made purposely for young people.”

“You’re leaving?” Pearl asked.

He regretted having said anything now. Martyn saw betrayal in his sister’s eyes. “The furthest I’ll be is in town. It doesn’t mean I’ll be gone forever. I’ll come back all the time.”

“Dad said he’d come back. Mummy said she’d come back.” Pearl crossed her arms.

Martyn felt his heart hurt. “Pearl, we all need our own space. You can’t share with G forever. We can’t live together forever. We’ll become dependent on each other.”

Jimmy had scooted himself, so he was under Martyn’s arm. “What does that mean, Martyn?”

“Umm, it means we won’t be able to live without each other.” He told his little brother. Martyn turned back to his sister and G. Both were holding back tears. “I’m not leaving you. I’d never do that to you.”

“But you are. You’re moving.” Grian said.

This wasn’t going well. He didn’t think it would, but Martyn had underestimated how it would feel. “I love you three so much. I just need time by myself so I can learn how to be a grown-up.” A lump formed in his throat.

Pearl turned away. “But we’ll be alone.”

“No, you’ll be here with Suma.” Martyn told them. “If I didn’t think he was trustworthy, I’d find somewhere else for us. Anyway, it’ll be fun. You’ll all get your own bedrooms.”

That was the wrong thing to say. “I don’t want my own bedroom, Martyn. I want us all to be together like you promised.” Pearl stormed out of the bedroom.

Grian looked towards the door with worry.

Martyn closed his eyes for a minute. That could’ve gone way better. He opened them again. “You can follow her G. The talks over I think.”

G nodded and followed his sister.

Jimmy snuggled into his side.

“Ok Timmy?” Martyn asked.

Jimmy shrugged. “Don’t go.” Sometimes Jimmy could act a little older than six, but his voice made him seem his age.

Martyn hugged his little brother close. “There’s a place that’s just a five-minute car ride away. If I go there, then we can see each other lots.”

“Every day?” Jimmy asked.

He hesitated. “Maybe we can start with every day.” Martyn suggested. “So you can get used to me not being there all the time. But eventually I’ll definitely come and see you at least once a week.”

“Will Suma look after us?” Jimmy looked up at him.

Martyn nodded. “Suma will look after you three. You have a lot of fun here, don’t you?”

Jimmy thought about it. He had loads of fun here, and he was never hungry or cold. Jim nodded. “Yeah.”

He picked up the chocolate packet and offered Jimmy another one. “Feeling, ok?”

“Sad.” Jimmy clutched Norman tighter.

Martyn held him. “I know Tim.” He sighed. “It’s ok though.”

-

Grian followed Pearl into Martyn’s bedroom. She was sat on the floor, back against the bed, curled up and her head on her knees. Her shoulders shook and quiet sobs escaped her. He came over to sit beside her. “Pearl?” He wrapped an arm around her.

She leant into him and wiped her eyes. “I want it to go back to how it was.”

“Us four against the rest of the world?” He asked.

Pearl nodded.

Grian went to get her a tissue and sat back down with her. “Yeah.” He passed it over. “You don’t trust Suma?”

She wiped her eyes. “Don’t know.”

There was a knock on the bedroom door. “It’s just me.” It was Xisuma. He came in but stayed by the door. “Can I sit with you?”

Grian nodded.

X came to sit with them on the floor. “Want to talk about it?” They didn’t answer so X continued. “Martyn told you what was happening

didn't he." The twins looked heartbroken. "Did you want a hug?"

Pearl came over first, her tears still rolling down her face. She buried her face into his shoulder.

Grian joined them a few moments later, which saw Xisuma holding both of them close. He rocked them a little. "Think of it like this." X said. "You see your friends at school don't you, but they don't live here. You know you'll see them again at school. It'll kind of be like that with Martyn. You'll live in separate houses, but you'll still get to see him all the time."

"Don't want him to go." Grian sniffed.

X nodded. "I know. Sometimes the people we love the most have to go and live their life. It doesn't mean they don't love us. It just means they want to have an adventure. At some point, you two will want to go on your own adventures, and Jimmy will too."

Pearl shook her head.

"It will take time to get used to it." X told them. "But think about how fun it will be for Martyn to come around for sleepovers. You'll have so much to show and tell him." Xisuma held them for a while longer. "Did you two want to choose a DVD?"

Pearl looked up. "But it's a school night."

It was indeed. "I don't mind tonight. Unless you want me to read a few chapters to you?"

The twins looked at each other.

"Book please." Grian asked.

X nodded. "Alright. You two do your teeth and then pick out a book. I'll see if Martyn and Jim want to join us."

They got up and went to the bathroom to do their teeth.

Xisuma stood and went to the twin's bedroom where the others were. He told them the plan.

Soon enough, they went to the living room, a place where they could all comfortably sit. Martyn sat on the armchair and Jimmy crawled onto his lap. He had Norman with him.

X sat in the middle of the sofa and the twins sat either side.

The book they chose was Narnia.

In their minds, they pictured four children, wardrobes with a door to another world, and lands filled with forever winter.

Jimmy soon fell asleep on his brother's lap and Grian's eyes started to close.

Xisuma finished the chapter. "Bedtime I think."

Martyn stood with Jimmy. "I'll take Tim up."

"Alright Martyn." X smiled. He looked at Pearl and Grian. "Do you two want me to tuck you in?"

Pearl nodded. They didn't often accept that offer. Normally they went to bed by themselves, but there was something nice about being put to bed by an adult who seemed to care about them.

They went upstairs.

Pearl and Grian got into their own beds.

X gave them both a hug. "I hope you have a good sleep. Remember if you need me, I'm only down the hall."

"Night Suma." They spoke.

X smiled and left them.

Martyn came in a moment later. "Hey. Just wanted to make sure you two were alright before you went to sleep." He sat on Pearls bed.

"M ok." Pearl said.

"Yeah." G agreed.

Martyn nodded. "Ok. I love you both."

"Love you Martyn." Pearl gave him a hug.

He went to Grian and hugged him too. "Ok, see you in the morning." Martyn left them and went to his own room.

-

The next morning, Xisuma messaged Impulse.

Xisuma: Hey Impulse. I was wondering if you were free this Saturday.

-

X had also messaged Mrs. Beans that morning too.

-

Impulse: Hey. Depends on what you need me for.

Xisuma: I'm taking my eldest to look at some flats. I was wondering if you would be able to take Jimmy for the day, please? If not, then no worries.

Impulse: I'll be able to. Let me just speak to Gem about it.

Xisuma: Alright, thank you Impulse.

-

He got the children ready for school. Martyn had already left for the bus. "Ok, shoes coats?" The kids came downstairs. "Alright, good. Grian sweetie, your shirt is inside out."

Grian looked down and a cheeky grin appeared on his face. "I know. I want to see how many people notice."

X paused for a moment, seeing whether this battle was worth fighting. He decided it wasn't. "Alright, but if a teacher asks you to change it around, you will, won't you?"

"Yup."

"Alright, Pearl, are you tying your hair up?" X asked her.

She hesitated and passed him the hair bobble she had in her hand. "Can you do it?"

X smiled. "Of course." He put Jimmy's school bag down and put her hair in a ponytail. "There you go. Oh Jimmy, your book bag is on the sofa."

The youngest went to get it.

“Got everything? Lets go then.” X took them outside and looked the house up. “Alright, Jimmy, I’ve had a word with the people who are in charge of the school, and they should’ve had a word with the teachers, so we can get rid of the bullying. If you still get picked on, I want you to tell me.”

Jimmy nodded.

He helped him into the car. “We’ll get this sorted.” X kissed his head.

Jimmy smiled.

X drove them to school. Funnily enough, he managed to park next to Impulse.

“Gem!” Jimmy managed to leave the car by himself. “Gem!” He jumped up and down.

Impulse exited the car and smiled at X. “Morning.”

“Good morning.” Xisuma said.

The twins came out of the car and Impulse helped Gem out.

“Hi Jimmy.” Gem smiled a little.

Jimmy grinned but gasped. “Suma, we forgot Gem’s book.”

He ruffled his hair. “It’s in your book bag.”

“Oh ok.” Jimmy opened his bag and took out the book. “Falsie and me got you a book.”

Her eyes widened in awe as she took it. “Oh, thank you!”

Grian and Pearl had spotted their friends in the playground. “X, can we go in?”

Xisuma nodded. “Yes. Let’s go.” They crossed the road and went inside the school. The kids went to play but Jimmy and Gem stayed nearby.

“You didn’t want me to take the other two on Saturday?” Impulse asked.

“They’re going to their friend’s house.” X explained.

Impulse nodded. “Ok. Any dietary requirements?”

Xisuma shook his head. “Not that I know of.”

“Alright. I’ll sort something out.” Impulse smiled.

“I appreciate it mate.” X said.

The school bell rang for the start of class.

Gem came to hug Impulse. “Do I have to?”

He stroked her hair. “Until lunch time, but if you can manage to whole day, that will be awesome Gemmy. You can play with Jimmy and False.”

She nodded. “Ok.” Gem sighed and went back to Jimmy.

False and her Aunt came through the gates.

“Yay False is here!” Jimmy grinned. “Bye Suma.”

“See you Jimmy.” X smiled and went to say goodbye to Pearl and G too.

False ran up to Jimmy and Gem. “Hi. Jimmy did you give Gem the book?”

“Yeah, I love it!” Gem smiled and hugged her.

Mrs. Norris came over. “Come on you three, class time.” She was about to go with them but Impulse stopped her.

“This bullying this will stop, right?” He asked.

“I’ll speak to the children.” She said before she went inside with the kids.

Impulse stood by the gate and waited for X. He only had to wait a few moments. “Hey. Want to grab a coffee?”

X looked at the time. “Yeah, why not.”

-

Mrs. Norris thankfully did end up talking to the children about bullying, and that it was wrong. However, the conversation lasted two minutes and likely did nothing to deter some of the kids from bullying Jimmy.

Jimmy, Gem and False sat with each other at lunch. Gem looked at the time and smiled a little bit. Maybe today she would manage the whole day.

“What was Canada like?” False asked, opening her lunch box up.

Gem shrugged. “Pretty. Cold. Snowy.”

“What did you do in Canada?” Jimmy asked as he put some sandwich in his mouth.

She took out a juice carton. “Not much. Not good things.”

Jimmy opened his chocolate and offered his friends some. “We can talk about something else.”

“Yeah.” False smiled. “I think we’re gonna do rounders in PE.”

Gem tilted her head. “What’s rounders?”

“A game with balls and bats.” False said. “And lots of running.”

“Ah ok.” Gem stabbed the straw into the carton and sipped it.

-

Xisuma followed Impulse in his car to his house. X wanted to know where his place was anyway to get him familiar for when he took Jimmy. Number 6, Acorn Road. There were a Coop and a Little Tesco’s near it. He got out his car after Impulse. “Nice place.”

Impulse looked at the house. “Bit of a Culture shock to be honest. I was worried it would be too small for Gem and I, but then I saw this was the standard size for over here.”

X nodded. “Ah yeah, you’ve got quite big houses in the state.” He followed Impulse outside. “I didn’t know you could move with foster children out the country.”

Impulse took his shoes and coat off. “You’re not supposed to. Not really. But there was a special circumstance.” He went into the kitchen and set up the coffee machine. “We were granted a pass to come here, for Gem’s safety.

Xisuma leant against the counter. “I see. So, you left, just like that?”

“Yep. I had only just signed on to be a foster carer. Before that I

worked in a tech shop with my best friend Skizz. It was quite fun. Selling and repairing old computers." He took out some mugs. "Now Skizz's cousin. He's in middle school. Absolute Genius this kid is with computers."

X smiled. "I used to like IT in school. More of a music man myself though."

Impulse's face lit up. "Do you play any instruments?"

"A few, but mostly guitar." X said.

Impulse poured the coffee into the mugs. "Dude that's sick! I play the drums." He passed him a mug.

"How are you handling the cold?" Xisuma sipped his coffee, forgetting it was still hot and slightly burning his tongue.

"It's freezing over here." He laughed a little. "It doesn't matter too much. As long as Gem is ok." Impulse sipped his own. "There are some terrible people out there."

Xisuma nodded. "Tell me about it. Kids shouldn't have to take the weight of the world on their shoulders. That's what we're here for."

Impulse put his mug down on the counter. "How long have you been a Foster Carer for?"

"October. As soon as I got it, they rung me to take in the four I have now." X explained. "I might be getting attached I have to be honest. They're amazing people."

Impulse smiled a little. "Is it permanent?"

"Yeah." X sipped more coffee. "I think the social workers are happy with that, actually. Monthly checkups to make sure they're going ok, but that's about it. So I'm just, forever their Foster Father now. I didn't think it would happen like that." He smiled. "I care for them so much. All four of them are amazing."

"That's relatable." Impulse finished his coffee and put the mug in his sink. "I am so proud of how far Gem's come."

X nodded. "I hope we can be what they need us to be."

"I'm sure we will." Impulse smiled. "It probably won't all be smooth, but at least we can try our best for them."

Chapter End Notes

Ranchers!! Woo!!!

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

> Chapter warnings!!!!
> Slight emetophibia warning in the beginning. No actual being sick, but feeling it.
> Also big mental health warnings. Jimmy's not doing too well.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Maybe Jimmy shouldn't have stopped therapy.

That statement floated about his mind all night as he scrolled through his phone. He reposted a Hotguy Poster on Twitter from season four. More scrolling. Jimmy retweeted some fan art.

A few messages and likes popped up on his notifications.

Maybe he shouldn't have stopped therapy.

He was supposed to be on his way to London to finish filming season five, but instead he was on his bed in the dark.

When had he last changed his covers? Or cleaned his room for that matter?

Some messages from the family group chat popped up. Just one from Suma. He swiped it away.

More tweets liked. More minute's past. He'd missed the train he'd booked for London. Jimmy's stomach twisted. Now he'd failed Scar and Grian.

A notification popped up from Instagram. It was a message from False.

Jimmy paused. It was like someone had put a hand down his throat and was about to yank his stomach out. False had messaged?

His thumb hovered over the notification, and he pressed it just before it went away. Instagram came up.

-

False:

Hey Jimmy, I know we haven't spoken in so long, and you probably don't want anything to do with this message, which is totally ok. You don't have to reply, I just needed to get this off my chest.

I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry I left like I did. You deserved to know long before I told you. I'm sorry that I hurt you. I'm sorry that I never gained the courage to message you before now. I promised I wouldn't forget you, and I never did. I'm sorry if I made you feel like I forgot.

I really wish I could tell you this in person. I hope you're doing ok Jimmy.

-

Jimmy couldn't read half of it. Tears in his eyes blurred out the screen. He sniffed and wiped his eyes.

Why did he keep crying?

He shouldn't message her, it had been far too long, but he missed his best friend. Jimmy missed her so much, he couldn't remember what it had been like with her. So, Jimmy did the best thing he could do and messaged her.

-

Jimmy:

Have you messaged Gem?

False:

Yeah. She hasn't seen it yet.

Jimmy:

It's not your fault.

False:

It is. I left. I hurt you.

Jimmy:

It isn't. Just accept it.

False:

I don't know if I can.

Jimmy:

Right

False:

Jimmy I'm sorry

False:

Jimmy, I heard what happened after I left.

False

Jimmy

Jimmy:

How do you know about that?

False:

Think your dad messaged my Auntie?

Jimmy:

Is that why she blocked him?

False:

I don't know. Maybe?

Jimmy: Right

Jimmy: I have to go.

-

What was he supposed to do?

"Fuck, I feel sick." He whispered to himself, sitting up. Jimmy left his phone on the bed and rushed to the bathroom. Nothing came out thankfully, but it felt close. Too close.

Jimmy rested his head on the toilet seat. Tears pricked his eyes. God, his eyes were so sore from all the rubbing he'd been doing. He knew they were red and raw.

The phone rang from the other room; Tango's call tone.

It rang through.

Another added guilt. Jimmy could've answered that call.

The world was crashing down around him, and he didn't know what to do.

After a moment, he got up.

He needed to call Tango back. Just in case he thought something was wrong.

-

"Sorry, I was in the bathroom." Jimmy said when Tango answered. It was only a phone call, not face time.

“It’s ok.” Tango said. “Can I get lost in your eyes today?”

No. Absolutely not. Jimmy looked a mess. “Sorry, it’s dark in here.”

There was some rustling on the other side. “Ah, ok.”

Jimmy caught the disappointment in his voice.

“So, are you in London already? I don’t hear train noisifications.” Tango asked.

Oh yeah, Tango knew his filming schedule. “Yeah, m in the hotel.” Why lie?

“Ok, I should let you go and film. Text me when you’ve finished love.” Tango said.

Jimmy was a terrible person. “I will firefly.” He disconnected the call.

He was the worst person in the world.

-

Grian: Timmy

Grian: Tim

Grian: Pick up your phone

Grian: Where are you?

Grian: Jimmy Solidarity, pick up your phone!

-

Grian: Dad, Jimmy’s not answering his phone

Dadsuma: Isn’t he filming tonight?

Grian: Well he’s not here. Not at the hotel. Never checked in.

Dadsuma: Text the group chat to see if someone can check on him. I have a baby with me tonight.

Grian: Alright.

-

Grian: Has anyone seen Timmy? Can someone check on him?

Pearl: I'll drive over.

Impulse: He isn't in London?

Gem: Wherever he is, I don't think he's going to be in a good mindset.

Gem: False messaged. I assume she messaged Jim too.

Pearl: Oh god...

Grian: What for? She left years ago.

Gem: Remember it's not her fault.

Grian: No, but her leaving caused Jimmy to nearly die in hospital.

Grian: It's the facts.

Gem: I don't think she knows that G.

Grian: Then tell her.

Jimmy: Stop talking about me in the family group chat.

Jimmy: You're not telling False anything.

Jimmy: I'm fine. Just over napped and missed my train.

Grian: Right.

Grian: Unprofessional Timmy.

Scar: We can reschedule for tomorrow, it's fine.

Jimmy: I'm on the train. I'll go straight there.

Scar: Alright :)

Impulse: Jimmy, are you sure you're ok?

Jimmy: Uh huh.

-

The train was empty apart from a few passengers. It was late. Jimmy was alone. He had decided to go to London to film. He couldn't be selfish and *not* do it. Not when people depended on him.

-

Tango: You know that story we made up a few weeks back?

Tango: Well, I wanted to put the characters together, so I draw a little sketch of the Dungeon Master and his Rancher Xxx

Tango: I wasn't going to show it you yet, but I thought it might cheer you up. Xx

-

He sent a picture of the sketch. The Dungeon Master was up against a wall of the citadel, hand up to cup Jimmy's cheek. His Stetson sat askew on his head. Jimmy's far hand was pressed against the wall, just above Dungeon Master's shoulder. They were looking deep into each other's eyes.

-

Jimmy: That why you asked how tall I was the other day?

Tango: Yep :)

Tango: It's just a sketch at the moment.

Jimmy: They look like they love each other very much.

Tango: They do. They love each other so much.

Jimmy: Us in another universe?

Tango: Why not us in this universe?

Jimmy: I don't live on a Ranch.

Tango: True.

Tango: Jimmy, please tell me you're alright.

Jimmy: I'm ok. Drawing cheered me up.

Tango: 😶

Jimmy: I'm going into a tunnel now. Will loose signal. X

Tango: Thought you were already there?

Jimmy: Yeah. Anyway. Beautiful drawing. I love it Firefly.

Tango: Jim.

Jimmy: Sorry. I lied earlier.

Tango: You're not ok.

Jimmy: Yeah.

Tango: What can I do to help you?

Jimmy: There probably isn't anything you can do.

Jimmy: It's just one of those things.

Tango: I wish I could get over there and hold you close.

Jimmy: That would be nice. You're so far though.

Tango: Only a flight away.

Jimmy: Ten hours. And expensive.

Tango: I've never been to London.

Jimmy: Tango, save your money for your company you want to do.

Tango: Maybe seeing you is more important.

Jimmy: We've not known each other that long. Don't waste your money on me.

Tango: Alright. But that's not going to stop me come and see if you're ok.

Tango: Unless you really don't want me to.

Jimmy: Of course I want you too.

Tango: Then I will.

-

Jimmy arrived in London and eventually came to the filming location. He hoped he didn't look a mess still. Jimmy tried to smile, but his brother saw right past his facade.

He tried to stay away from him as much as possible, unless they were actively filming.

February 2009

"Martyn, when are you going?" Jimmy asked as he packed his sleepover bag to go to Gems.

Martyn was helping him pack because Jimmy couldn't be trusted. "Not until after I take my exams. Have you got everything?"

Jimmy nodded. "Got Norman. Yep."

"And your jammies?" Martyn asked.

"Woody Jammies." Jimmy grinned. He pulled everything out of his bag. "Toothbrush. Toothpaste. Norman. Jammies."

Martyn smiled a little. "Good job buddy. Let's get some clean clothes for tomorrow too yeah?"

Jimmy stood up and went to his chest of draws. "I like Impy."

"That's good Timmy." Martyn put the items back in Jimmy's bag. "You enjoyed it when you went around theirs the other Saturday, didn't you."

The boy nodded. "It was so fun."

"I'm glad." Martyn stood. "Alright, Impulse will be here to pick you up in a minute."

"What are you and Pearly and G doing?" Jimmy asked him.

Martyn ruffled his hair. "I'm going into the city with Netty tonight and we're going to see a film at the cinema. I think Pearl and Grian are just hanging out with Suma."

The doorbell rang downstairs.

Jimmy gasped. “Gem!” He grabbed his bag. Jim rushed down the stairs and got to the door as soon as X opened the door. “Hi Impy.”

“Hello Jimmy. Gem’s in the car.” Impulse greeted him with a smile.

Xisuma helped Jimmy with his shoes and coat. “You’ll be good for Impulse, won’t you?” He asked.

“Yep.” Jimmy then hugged X without prompt. He let go and went to say goodbye to everyone else. “Bye bye Suma.”

“Have fun Jimmy.” X told him.

Jimmy double checked he had Norman and went with Impulse to the car. “Gem!”

“Jimmy!” Gem was on her car seat. She was in a pink and white princess dress. Sleeping Beauty’s.

Impulse helped Jimmy into the car.

Jimmy grinned. “You’re a princess!”

Gem smiled and nodded. “I am! We can play princesses, Jimmy.”

“I can be a princess too?” Jimmy giggled.

Impulse couldn’t keep the smile off his face hearing the two of them.

“Yeah, I have a Belle dress at home too.” Gem said.

Jimmy beamed. “I love Belle!”

Impulse got into the car and drove off. “You two can play for a bit whilst I make dinner.”

“Ok Impy.” Gem said and looked out of the window.

Jimmy took Norman out of his bag. “What’s America like?”

Impulse looked through the rearview mirror. “America’s a big place. The part I lived in was very hot though.”

“Like the sun?” Jimmy asked.

He turned a corner and smiled. “Not as hot as the sun, but it’s pretty hot there.”

The children talked and laughed for the rest of the car ride to Impy's house, so it seemed like they got there in no time at all.

Impulse helped them out, locked the car up and let them inside. "The sleepover is going to be in the Livingroom. I'll get all the duvet's and everything for you both and some night lights."

They liked the sound of that idea.

"It's princess time Jimmy." Gem took his hand and pulled him upstairs so Jimmy could wear a princess dress.

Impulse put their shoes neatly against the wall and went to the kitchen for their dinner. He would have his later on.

He opened some tins of spaghetti hoops, put some bread in the toaster and cracked some eggs into a pan. Apparently, this was a British staple. Impulse wasn't going to stoop so low as to put baked beans on toast.

Impulse went to the Livingroom to find the kids playing. "Dinner's ready."

"Impy, can we do it so that we're princesses and you're the maid?" Gem asked him, fully in play mode.

He nodded. "Ok. Princess Gem. Princess Jimmy, dinner is served."

The children giggled and followed him to the dining room table where their plates were laid out. They got into their chairs.

Jimmy gasped. Spaghetti hoops! His favorite.

Impulse left them to their tea and went to clean the kitchen.

"We could pretend that the food is magic Jimmy." Gem smiled as she dipped a bit of toast into some runny egg.

He nodded and picked up the fork. The egg looked delicious, and he was excited to dip the toast in the yolk, but the longer he looked at the spaghetti hoops, the less hungry he felt. The smell didn't seem as sweet as it used to be. It smelt of home. The old home, not the home he had now.

Gem's voice faded away in his mind and all he heard were sirens, the smell of tomato and metal.

But he had to eat all of his dinner. Impy would be mad otherwise.

Jimmy looked over and saw Gem had stopped talking. He scooped the spaghetti hoops with his fork and tried to put it in his mouth.

“Jimmy, don’t you like it?” Gem asked.

“It’s yummy.” He muttered and shoved the hoops in his mouth. Jimmy swallowed them.

Gem got off her chair. “I’ll get Impy.”

“No.” His eyes widened. “Impy will get mad.”

She hesitated. “I’ve never seen Impy get mad.”

Jimmy tried another spoonful. “Grownup’s always get mad.”

“Impy didn’t get mad when he took me away from the bad grownups.” Gem said. “I didn’t eat all my dinner. He didn’t get mad.”

“Bad grownups?” Jimmy asked her.

Gem pursed her lips and sat back down. “My mummy and daddy hurt people. They didn’t look after me very well. I think they tried to find me when I went to Impy so we had to move here.”

Jimmy nodded a little. “Oh.”

Impulse came in. “Hey.” He saw their plates were still full. The smiles and the laughing had vanished. Gem had eaten a little more than Jimmy, but it still wasn’t a lot. His heart fell. “What’s up?”

Jimmy looked down in shame. “Sorry Impy.”

Impulse took one of the chairs and sat in it. “What for Jimmy?” He kept his voice soft.

“Don’t like it.” Jimmy muttered.

“That’s ok. I can make you something else.” Impulse told him. “What about it didn’t you like?”

Jimmy pointed at the hoops. “It’s like when Mummy is home.”

Impulse understood now. “Did you have hoops a lot before you went to live with Xisuma?”

Jimmy nodded.

“I’ll get you something else, don’t worry.” Impy turned to Gem. “Didn’t you like it, Gem?”

“I like it Impy.” She smiled a little. “Just was worried about Jimmy.”

Impulse stood and took Jimmy’s plate. “That’s ok Gemmy. Would you like a sandwich or something Jimmy? I can make grilled cheese or something.”

“What’s that?” Jimmy asked.

“A melted cheese sandwich?” Impulse said, a little unsure. He was positive a grilled cheese was something else in the UK.

Jimmy understood. “A cheese toastie.”

Now that made a lot of sense. “Yes, I can do you one of those.”

“Yes, please Impy.” Jimmy shifted in his chair. “Are you, are you mad?”

Impulse turned back around. “Jimmy, I’m not mad. I promise.” He went to get Jimmy a toastie.

Gem took a bite of toast and got off her chair to go to Jimmy. “See, he’s not mad. Said he wouldn’t.”

“Suma might.” Jimmy whispered.

Gem shook her head. “Suma’s your dad.”

“Not proper.” Jimmy crossed his arms over his stomach.

“Jimmy.” Gem sighed.

He took a shaky breath. “I can’t do wrong things Gem. Cus no one will want me anymore.”

Gem hugged him.

Impulse came back with Jimmy’s Cheese Toastie. “One toastie for Jimmy. Did you want me to sit with you both?”

They nodded.

“Ok. Gemmy sweetie, your dinner’s going to get cold.” Impulse sat opposite them. “How’s school going? Have you both had a lot of fun in class?”

Jimmy shrugged. “Fun with Gem and False.”

Gem agreed. “Yeah. Lots of fun, but Mrs. Norris talked with the class and now everyone is keeping away from Jimmy.”

Impulse held back a sigh. “Ok. As long as they aren’t being mean.”

The night should’ve been fun. It was fun; Jimmy and Gem played a lot of games and the three of them watched a DVD but Jimmy just couldn’t take his mind of being a disappointment.

What if no one wanted him if he did something wrong?

Jimmy sat up. Gem had just fallen asleep, and Impulse was upstairs. Why did he feel so bad but have so much fun at the same time? Should he be allowed fun?

Why did he love it here so much?

Jimmy got up and went to the door. Impulse had told them to get him if they needed him, and Jimmy felt like he needed to talk to him.

“Hey Jimmy. Can’t sleep?” Impulse asked him. He’d just come out of his room to do his teeth.

Jimmy nodded. “Impy. No one’s mad at me are they?”

Impulse knelt beside him. “No one’s mad at you. You’ve done absolutely nothing wrong. Even if you made a mistake, no one would be mad.”

“What if, what if it’s on purpose.” Jimmy asked.

“Give me an example buddy.” Impulse said.

Jimmy thought. “If I pushed someone.”

Impulse nodded. “What rules does Xisuma have?”

“Suma said we have to sit on the stairs and say sorry to them.” Jimmy explained.

“I see.” Impulse said. “Then that’s exactly what would happen. Yes,

we might be a little bit upset, but we wouldn't shout at you. As long as you understood why it was bad. There are always consequences to our actions. Like if I threw some cake on the floor, I would have to clean it up. If I hurt someone's feelings, I would have to say sorry and do something to help them. However, no matter what you do, no one is going to get rid of you."

Jimmy nodded and hesitated, trying to think of something else. "No hitting?"

"No one is going to hit you, and if they do, I want you to tell me and Suma right away." Impulse said.

Jimmy tried to think of something else.

Impulse put a comforting hand on his arm. "Where do you feel the safest and happiest?"

"Suma's house and here." Jimmy answered.

Impulse smiled. "I'm glad you feel safe here. You're a good boy Jim. You do so many kind things for other people and I'm proud of you. Of course, it's ok if you make mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes. Those mistakes won't stop us from caring about you and the others."

Jimmy hugged him. "Thank you Impy."

"It's ok Kiddo." Impulse held him. He kissed the top of his head. "Think you can try and sleep?"

"Yeah." Jimmy smiled a little.

Impulse didn't let go of the hug until Jimmy wanted to. "Have you got Norman?"

"Norman's sleeping." Jimmy let go.

Impulse stood and took his hand. "I'll tuck you in again." They went back downstairs.

-

A zoom though time

The months zoomed by as the children got into their routines of school and home time. The winter months melted into a warmer and more colorful spring. Flowers started to shoot up from the ground and

the nightly frosts became less frequent.

More often than not, Jimmy spent his days with Gem and False at one of their houses. He loved spending time with his best friends.

Spring warmed into summer, and Martyn's exams came up, which also meant he was going to move house soon. His siblings weren't happy with this. They stayed at his side as much as possible.

-

One night, the one before Martyn's move, Xisuma came to him. "Martyn, can I talk to you about something please?"

Martyn looked up from his book and set it down, but not before putting the bookmark inside the pages. "Uh huh."

"So, nothing is set in stone yet, this is purely an idea." X sat down in a chair. "No matter what, I'll always be your foster parent, and I was thinking about possibly..."

Xisuma was cut off. "You're thinking about adoption." Martyn sat up. "Why? You haven't known us a year yet."

That was true. "I care about you four."

"Yes, but do you love us?" Martyn asked.

X didn't even have to think. "I do." Actually, this was one of the most nerve wracking conversations he'd ever had.

"Good, because they deserve the love, not just the care." Martyn picked up his book again and took the bookmark out. He didn't start to read again.

"Only them?" X asked. "You deserve that love too."

Martyn looked over his book at his foster dad. "By the time the adoption takes place, I'll be an adult. I don't need this as much as they do. I'm ok with you just being my foster dad."

Xisuma nodded a little. "That's your choice. However, this will still your home."

He smiled a little. "I know. Thanks X."

Xisuma stood up. "I'll tell the other's the plan once they've settled

with you moving out. Are you ready for tomorrow?"

"As ready as I'll ever be." Martyn said. "Impulse and Gem are coming tomorrow, aren't they?"

"Yep." X nodded.

Martyn smiled. "Timmy will be happy then." He looked at his book again and started to read.

-

The next day, they put all of Martyn's things into the van they rented for the move.

Pearl hovered by his bedroom door.

He turned. "Hey Pearl."

"Hi." She had Tilly in her arms.

Martyn came and hugged her. "I'll be here tomorrow for lunch."

She nodded. "Martyn?"

"Mm?" He hummed.

"If I have this room, where will you sleep?" She asked.

Martyn answered, "Suma has a blow-up mattress. The sofa is comfy too. I'll be fine. How are you going to decorate the room?"

"Lots of castles." She smiled a little and let go of the hug. "You'll definitely be here tomorrow?"

"I will." Martyn smiled. "Ok, I think it's time for me to go now."

Pearl nodded. "Ok." She wasn't completely sure about this.

He squeezed her hand. "I'll see you later Pearl." Martyn left her, rucksack over his shoulder. Martyn said goodbye to his brothers who gave him big hugs. Jimmy didn't really notice Martyn had gone, because he was playing a game with Gem and Impulse.

Xisuma drove Martyn to his flat. He helped him put his things inside. "You'll call me if you need anything won't you?"

“I will.” Martyn said. “You’ll look after the kid’s, right?”

“I promise.” X offered a hug and Martyn hugged him. “Will you be ok from here?”

Martyn nodded. “Yep.” He let go and started opening his boxes.

Xisuma stayed to help for another ten minutes or so to make sure Martyn settled in alright before going home.

Impulse had set up a card game to entertain the children. He got up when he saw X, kissed Gem’s head and went with him to the kitchen to make some snacks.

“How was it?” Impulse asked.

X put the kettle on. “I think he’ll settle in well enough. It really felt like watching one of your kids move out.”

Impulse nodded. “That’s understandable. Have you talked to them about adoption yet?”

X got out some mugs for them and cups for the children. “I asked Martyn. He didn’t want it, which I get. I’m going to talk to the other’s when I think they’re ready. I’m not looking for an answer right away.”

“You’re a good man.” Impulse told him. He poured some juice into the cups.

“As are you.” Xisuma smiled. “Back onto the school grind tomorrow. I think the children are seeing their next year classes. To get used to the teachers.”

Impulse nodded. “That’s a good idea. I hope the next teacher has more backbone than Mrs. Norris. I don’t think she did enough to stop the bullying.”

“I don’t think the bullying has stopped.” X said. “Not really. Jimmy, Gem and False are still being excluded from the rest of their class.”

He went to the cupboard to get some crackers. “As soon as we know who their teacher is, we can email them. I don’t want to move schools, because I’ve only just got Gem to settle into this one, but I will if I have to.”

“That’s fair.” X said. “I’ll do the same.” He stirred the tea around with

some teaspoons. “How do you not have kettles in the states?”

Impulse shrugged. “It’s a power thing I think. I called my friend from back there yesterday. He was baby sitting his nephew.”

“Skizz and Tango right?” X asked.

He nodded. “Yep. Well anyway, they were telling me a funny story about some people in the shop.” Impulse carried on with his story and Xisuma listened.

-

May slipped into June, and June slipped into July. Xisuma gathered the courage to talk to Pearl, Jimmy and Grian about the adoption idea. He made them milkshakes and sat them down.

“Hey.”

“Hi Suma.” The seven-year-old smiled.

Pearl and Grian kept quiet as they often did when it came to talks, not knowing what to expect.

“I have something to ask you.” X sat forward. “Do you three know what adoption is?”

They nodded.

X sat back. “I’ve already spoken to Martyn about this, but I just wanted to ask, if you would like me to be your dad.” His words came out a little all over the place, but they would do.”

There was silence.

“What did Martyn say?” Grian asked.

“Martyn didn’t want, which is perfectly fine. It’s his choice. You three are allowed different choices.” X told them.

Jimmy thought about this. “So, you’ll be our daddy?”

“If you want me to be.” Xisuma answered.

“What if we say no?” Pearl asked.

“Then nothing changes.” X told them. “I will still love you and care for

you. This will still be your home."

She nodded a little.

Xisuma carried on. "Adoption just means I have legal rights to be your parent forever. I have the final say in your care."

"What if the social workers say no?" Pearl asked.

"I've asked them and checked with everyone I could to make sure it was possible." X told them. Since all three of them had living fathers, he had to ask them if he could do this. They'd agreed. Actually, they had said that they didn't give a shit, but Xisuma was going to keep that bit of information to himself. "You don't have to decide right away. I'll give you as long as you want to decide."

The three nodded.

"I'll go and think about it." Pearl got up and headed upstairs.

Grian followed her. "Pearl."

They went to his room.

Pearl sat on her brother's bed. "He can't really mean this right?"

Grian shrugged. "Pearl, I think he might actually care for us."

"It's got to be a trick, right?" She spoke. "I mean he's acting nice now, but once it's all legal he could." Pearl paused. "Not want us."

He sighed. "True." Grian thought. "We could test it? Maybe we do things to see if he stops caring."

"Like acting up?" Pearl seemed unsure. "He'll kick us out."

"Better now when we're ready for it." Grian shrugged. "Let's not tell Tim though."

She nodded. "Alright. We can try it out. But then, what if he doesn't want to adopt us anymore?"

Grian sat back. "I don't know. We'll think of something if it happens."

"Yeah, you're right."

The pair of them planned.

Downstairs, Xisuma started dinner, and Jimmy was left in the living room with Norman. He looked down at his teddy. “I want Suma to be my dad.” Jimmy said. “But. I love him and Impy.” He hugged Norman close.

Chapter End Notes

I have the next chapter written up, but I'm not sure if I'm too keen on the flashback scene of it. Mostly becuase I've had to zoom a lot of time forward becuase I have more Idea's for the flashback than I do for the present days.

And it's annoying.

So it might seem a bit out of place when I zoom forward in time. : (

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

> Heyo! Just a warning, there are Self harm mentions, but I do point it out just before the mention :) Nothing graphic

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Filming for season five had wrapped up, and Jimmy had nothing to do. He had his cats, and he had his siblings to annoy, but they were busy with their own lives. He had Tango, but again, they were hardly awake at the same time. If they were, it meant one of them got less sleep.

Not that Jimmy minded that. He could afford to lose a few hours just to talk to Tango. It was nice to have his voice in his ear.

One afternoon he heard a knock on the door, though Jimmy ignored it. He didn't want to get up from the sofa, and if a deliverer had a parcel, they could leave it by the door. Any family member would message first.

The doorbell rang a moment later, and then his phone.

It was Tango.

Strange time for Tango to call. It would be early in Arizona.

Jimmy answered his phone. "Hey Rancher."

"Hi Jimmy. Could you open the door for me? It's cold." Tango said.

He blinked. What? "Tango what?"

"I'm outside, Jimmy," Tango said.

Jimmy rushed up, not disconnecting the call. He sped to his door and unlocked it. His heart raced. This couldn't be happening. It had to be a dream. It had to...

He opened it and low and behold, Tango Tek stood on the other side, completely drenched and cold. Jimmy saw Tango was a bit shorter than anticipated, yet here he was. He wanted to cry.

He started to.

“Tango.” Jimmy rushed into his arms. “Oh my god, you’re here. How are you here?”

Despite his exhaustion and sogginess, Tango dropped his suitcase and held him close. “Hi Jimmy.”

Jimmy leaned back, but stayed close to his touch, “Oh my god. How are you here?”

Tango took his hand and cupped Jimmy’s face. “Your dad called me. Turns out he’s my cousin’s best friend.”

Jimmy nodded a little. He couldn’t let go of the sight of him. His eyes, his face. “You’re going to get a chill, come in. Get out of those clothes, I’ll put them in the wash.”

“Want me out of my clothes already do you?” Tango joked a little. He smiled. There was a pause. “You’re even more handsome in person.”

A small blush settled on Jimmy’s cheeks.

Tango gasped. “Oh, I can see you blush now.”

That deepened it. “Inside.” Jimmy pulled Tango in and went back to get his suitcase. “How long have you been planning this?”

“No planning.” Tango toed his shoes off by the door. “Like I said, your dad called. Everyone’s worried about you, so I wanted to come and make sure you’re ok.” He stripped out of his jacket.

“Right.” Jimmy nodded, wondering where to go from this. “Did you want a shower?”

“Please.” Tango smiled.

Jimmy went upstairs to put out some clean towels for him. He came back down to Tango rifling through his suitcase for clean clothes. “Ok?”

“Uh huh. Just getting some dry clothes.” Tango said. “We can talk after.”

Talk? “About what?”

Tango shrugged. “Whatever you like.”

Jimmy showed him to the bathroom. “Have you eaten?”

“A bit ago on the plane.” Tango said, hovering by the bathroom door.

Jim nodded. “I’ll make something. The cats are on my bed if you want to see them.” He left Tango to shower and descended the stairs. Jimmy rubbed his face with his hands. Tango was in the same house as him. His Rancher was upstairs.

He got his phone from the sofa and texted his dad.

-

Jimmy: You called Tango?

Impulse: Yes I did. 😶

Jimmy: You knew Tango?

Impulse: A long time ago, but yes. I did.

Jimmy: Tango said you were worried?

Impulse: I was. When was the last time you left your house?

Jimmy: When I finished filming the other day.

Impulse: Son, that was a few weeks ago.

Jimmy: Yeah.

-

He put his phone down and heated some rice in the microwave. Jimmy moved to the cupboard to make some type of sauce and then to the fridge to collect a small variety of salad bits. He hoped it would be enough. His cupboards appeared to be lacking these days.

The shower turned off upstairs.

Jimmy brought the bowls of rice upstairs on a tray and set them down on the bed. He sat beside the cats and stroked their fur, earning him some purrs from them both.

Tango came in, clean clothes on and blond hair damp from the shower. “Smells good.”

“It’s just rice.” Jimmy said.

Tango shrugged. “I like rice.” He sat on the other side and picked up one of the bowls. Tango scooped some of the rice onto his spoon and ate it. “It’s good.”

Jimmy smiled a little and started to eat his as well. “It’s weird that you knew my dad.”

“He worked in a little shop with Skizz.” Tango took another bite.

Jimmy did the same. “What’s weirder is I swear I remember him talking about his best friends genius cousin.”

“I wouldn’t say genius.” Tango huffed a laugh.

Jim put his bowl down on the tray, half finished. “You make games. I couldn’t.”

Tango finished his bowl. He shrugged that statement off and brought his attention to the cat’s. “Aren’t they beautiful.”

Jimmy turned his head to them. “They are. They’re good company.” He stood and took the tray downstairs, putting it on the counter next to the sink before going back up. He saw Tango laying down. “Tired?”

“Very. I don’t want to sleep yet. Not until it’s closer to night.” Tango said. He reached his hand up for Jimmy.

Jim took it and got into the bed, lying next to him. Norman and Flick moved a little so they could get comfy again. Jimmy laid his head on Tango’s shoulder and closed his eyes. He breathed him in and let out a sigh. “Is it too soon to get into pyjamas?”

“Get into whatever you want to.” Tango said, one arm around his waist.

Although this was the first time they had done this, it seemed like the millionth time. They just fit with one another.

Jimmy sat up and moved out of bed to the draws. He put on some blue Pyjama trousers and an old grey shirt he used for bed. “Falling asleep?” Tango’s eyes were closed.

“Nope.” Tango got up. “No sleepification here.” He came over.

-(Warning for mentions of self-harm)-

“Ah hang on, let me find my hoodie.” Jimmy searched around with his eyes for one. He didn’t want Tango to see his...

Tango picked a hoodie up from the floor. “This one?”

“Yep. Thanks.”

Instead of throwing it over, Tango passed it. His gaze caught sight of Jimmy’s arms. Something flickered through his eyes, and instead of saying anything or asking questions, he just hugged him.

Jimmy leant his weight onto him. “Thank you.”

“For what?” Tango asked.

“For not being disgusted.” Jimmy leant back a little.

Tango held him close. “Why would I ever be disgusted?”

Jimmy shrugged.

“Jimmy,” Tango said softly. Nothing came after. He didn’t know what to say.

He sighed. “I don’t know Tango. Why did you come? I’m a mess.”

“I want to help you.”

Jimmy would’ve cried, if he had had any tears left to cry. Instead, he leant his head on Tango’s shoulder. “I feel like I’m broken.” He whispered.

Tango combed his fingers through his hair. “You’re not broken Jimmy. You’re hurt.”

“You travelled thousands of miles.” Jimmy said. He didn’t know why he kept fighting back but, he had to do something. He couldn’t let Tango get caught up in his emotions.

Tango didn’t stop his comforting moves. “What would The Dungeon Master and his Rancher do, in this situation. They live miles away from each other too.”

Jimmy closed his eyes and tried to imagine the pictures. “I think they would walk thousands of miles to get to one another.”

He smiled slightly. “Might take a while.”

“Would be worth it.” Jimmy said. “Can we watch a film? I hate talking about all this stuff. Not our Decked-Out love story, but the other stuff.”

Tango nodded. “Ok. Don’t let me fall asleep though.”

“I won’t.” Jimmy let go of the hug and took the other man’s hand. He didn’t deserve him at all. Crickey, he flew around half the world for him. It was almost too much. “Do you want to watch a DVD? Or something on Netflix or something.”

The American thought about it for a second as Jimmy got his laptop from his computer bag. “Your series comes out next year, right?”

Jimmy nodded.

“Then why don’t we start from season one?” Tango sat on the bed.

Jimmy threw his hoodie on as his laptop started up. “We can do. I didn’t think that was your cup of tea.”

“Cup of tea?” Tango grinned, leaning over. “Well obviously I want to watch your show, Jimmy.”

He blushed. “Ok, just tell me if you get bored of it.” Jimmy clicked onto the first episode. “I can tell you some behind the scenes though.”

Tango scooted so he was right next to Jimmy. He took his hand. “I’d love to know some behind the scenes thingy’s.”

There was something about having Tango next to him that made Jimmy’s heart feel light.

-

“Damn Ravengers!” Jimmy hit his hands on his desk.

Tango glanced over his laptop. “You died?”

“Uh, huh.” He spun around in his chair and yanked his headphones off. “And, and I was up from level four and right by the exit on level one!”

Amused, Tango looked back at his work. “You’ll get it.”

Jimmy stood from his chair and flopped onto the bed next to Tango. “How’s work?”

“Nearly finished. I can do the rest later.” Tango saved his work and turned off his laptop.

“You don’t have to stop.” Jimmy looked up at him.

Tango shrugged and closed it, setting it on the floor beside him. “I spend all my time working Jim. I have time to finish it later, but now, you’re here.”

Jimmy grinned. “Tango stop.” He said playfully.

Tango shuffled so he was laying down as well, just to get on Jimmy’s level. He took his hand and brought it up to kiss the back of it. “You’ll beat Decked Out.”

“Maybe. Hopefully before three comes out.” Jimmy’s grin had turned into a quiet smile as his eyes flickered over Tango’s features. He glanced at his lips. Jimmy wondered what kissing him would feel like. Hopefully as good as it felt to lay with him.

Quiet settled between them.

“What are you thinking about?” Tango asked him.

A blush lightly spread over his face. “Just um, thinking about your lips.”

“Oh?” Tango moved his hand up to cup his face. “What about them?”

The words got lost on the tip of his tongue for a moment. “Just wondered what it would be like to um, kiss them.”

Tango propped himself up with his other arm so he could see Jimmy a little better. “Then why don’t we find out? If you want to.”

Jimmy nodded slightly. “Please.”

Tango leant towards him and Jimmy met him halfway.

The first kiss was slow, and Tango’s lips were soft on his; almost better than he had imagined. Jimmy felt Tango’s thumb rub tiny patterns onto his cheek. Jimmy let out a contented sigh as he deepened it. The world disappeared entirely.

Tango broke the kiss, breathing heavier than before. “Hey.”

“Hi.” A giggle slipped from his lips. Something in his mind was

lighter. Not much, but he could feel it. “God you’re so handsome.”

Tango leant in for another quicker kiss. “I was going to say the same thing about you, Mr. Solidarity.”

“Me, handsome?” Jimmy grinned.

“Yep.” Tango couldn’t keep the smile off his face. Both were grinning like idiots.

Jimmy’s stomach rumbled.

“Someone’s hungry.” Tango sat up.

Jimmy followed. “Just a bit.”

“Let’s get some food.” Tango pulled Jimmy up out of bed.

Jimmy stumbled a little and Tango caught him. Again, they were face to face and Jimmy couldn’t help but plant another little kiss onto the other man’s lips. “So, food?”

Tango laughed fondly. “Yes, food.”

June 2009

“You’re not going to do anything too bad are you?” Pearl whispered in her brother’s ear as they stood in the playground. Her hair was tied into two plaits; Xisuma had learned how to braid and was now pretty good at it.

Grian shrugged. “It won’t be bad. Just bad enough that they’ll tell Suma.”

Pearl nodded. “Alright.”

“You don’t have to.” Grian told her.

She glanced over at their teacher. “I have to.”

“Ok. It’ll be easy. If they tell you to do something, say no.” He spoke.

“Yeah.” Pearl didn’t seem convinced. “Easy.”

The bell rang and they went to their classroom with the other students. Grian hung back. Did they refuse to go inside? No, that

would be like a tantrum. Joel waved them over and they sat down in their seats.

“How was footie with Oli?” Pearl asked him.

“Didn’t last long, the idiot kicked the ball over the fence.” Joel said, getting his pencil case out. “You’re a bit quiet Grian.”

Grian sat back and put his feet on the table. “Just thinking.”

Joel’s eyes widened. “Woah, Mrs. Humfrey won’t like that.”

The teacher in question was talking to another student at the front of the class.

Joel emptied his case. “Pearl, stop putting bloody purple rubbers in my pencil case.”

Pearl laughed. a little. “That’s what you get for saying my rubbers were rubbish.”

“They are! I’m going to get you back for this.” Joel promised. This had been going on for a few months now. The pay back got more and more serious each time. Well, not serious. Just more purple rubbers. The two had a collection of them now.

“Grian, please take your feet off the seat. You know my rules, follow them please.” Mrs. Humfrey’s voice came sharp from the other side of the room.

Pearl looked at his brother, eyes wide. She wasn’t sure about this, but she knew she had to help him. She cleared her throat and spoke up. “Don’t talk to my brother like that.” It sounded wrong on her tongue.

Grian still hadn’t taken his feet off the table.

Mrs. Humfrey assessed the situation. ”What’s wrong with you two? You don’t normally behave this way.”

Grian shrugged. “Behaving is for fucking pussies.” Gasps and nervous giggles filled the room.

“I won’t have that language in my classroom young man. Now go and stand outside and think about what you’re doing.” Mrs. Humfrey told him.

Grian crossed his arms. The entire class was watching. Joel tried to

fade into the background, not knowing what was going on with his friends. “I don’t think I will.”

Pearl felt she needed to do more. She stood. “If you’re making him stand outside, I’m going too. Rather than staying in here with a smelly old bat like you.” Pearl liked Mrs. Humfrey. She didn’t think she was smelly at all. She tensed up, preparing for the war that was about to come.

“Both of you out. I won’t stand for such disrespect. Your mother never brought you up like this, surely.” In the heat of anger, Mrs. Humfrey realised too late what she had said. “I I mean, your father. Foster Father.” But she didn’t apologies. “I’m going to ring your foster father right now. You two, outside. The rest of you, get on with your starter.”

Mother? Raised by their mother?

Pearl held her tongue, but Grian didn’t.

“We weren’t raised by a mother! She was useless. We were raised by Martyn! He was in this class, and you should’ve noticed! You should’ve noticed that he was looking after us, all by himself!” Grian stormed out of the room.

The room was deathly silent.

Pearl wondered if this had been a good idea at all. She held back her tears. She couldn’t cry in front of everyone. Pearl followed his brother out. He was kicking the wall.

“G.” She whispered. “Stop. It’ll hurt.”

“It’s stopping everything else hurt.” He stopped all the same.

The teacher walked out the room but decided not to talk to them for now. She headed to the office to call Xisuma.

Pearl slid down the wall and sat on the floor. “I don’t think this was a good idea.”

“I think it’s enough to see if he’ll kick us out or not.” Grian kept standing. “She kind of deserved it. I hate every teacher in this school.”

Pearl leant her head back on the wall. “Why?”

“Because none of them saw that something was wrong.” Grian said.

She shrugged. “We hid it.”

“They still should’ve seen.” G told her. “We were all hungry. Martyn took so much time off to look after Tim. None of our stuff was ironed because we never had an iron. Martyn used to get told off for sleeping in class, and someone should’ve seen.”

Pearl agreed with that. Someone should’ve seen. “Mrs. Cox from next door saw.”

“She’s been next door since before we were born. She just didn’t like us.” Grian finally sat on the floor. “Suma might hate us too.”

“He’s going to be so mad.”

So, the two of them just sat there and waited.

Shoes were heard coming down the corridor; a pair of heals and some boots. They looked up and saw it was Xisuma and Mrs. Humfrey. Neither looked happy.

This was it.

The teacher stood, looking down her pointed nose at the children, her arms crossed. Xisuma’s frow was burrowed. “Could you two stand up for me please?” Maybe the worst part was that X never raised his voice.

Pearl and Grian stood up.

“Mrs. Humfrey told me you two were being disrespectful towards her, is this true?” Xisuma asked them.

Silently, they nodded. They couldn’t trust their voices.

“And whilst I think there’s a reason you acted up today, that doesn’t excuse what you did. Do you both understand that?” X asked.

“Yes Suma.” They muttered.

Xisuma turned to the teacher. “And you said you made a mistake and said something in response.”

She didn’t answer.

He tried not to roll his eyes. “And did you apologies to them for that?”

“I don’t see why…” She was cut off by X.

“Don’t you think apologising is a good example to set?” It was rhetorical.

Xisuma turned back to Pearl and Grian. “As you both know, there are always consequences to your actions. I would like you to write Mrs. Humfrey a sorry letter please, and then I would like you to read it out to her.”

Pearl took a small breath. “What do you put in a sorry letter?” She asked quietly, not making eye contact with anyone.

“That’s a good question Pearl. In a sorry letter, you should say you’re sorry. Then you should put why you are sorry and explain that you understood what you did was wrong. Does that make sense?” X explained.

The twins nodded.

Xisuma continued. “If it’s alright with Mrs. Humfrey, you can do that in class now, and do any class work you missed as homework tonight.”

“Yes, that’s works out fine.” Mrs. Humfrey said.

X kept his focus on the kids. “When we get home, we will have a talk about this. Then you two can do your homework whilst I make dinner. Afterwards, we can read some more chapters of Harry Potter together.”

“I’m not sure rewarding them with a book…” Mrs. Humfrey cut off.

Xisuma finally looked at her. “I was going to plan a DVD for tonight actually, but I think a few chapters of a book will do.” He turned back to Pearl and Grian. “I’ll pick you up this afternoon like always. Would you both like a hug?”

They said no to the hug this time. They didn’t think they deserved one.

-

When school was over, Jimmy, Gem and False came out together, jumpers covered in splashes of red and blue poster paints. Each one had a very painted A4 of paper. Gem and Jimmy hugged False before she ran to her aunt.

Xisuma and Impulse stood together, talking. This delighted Jimmy to know end. “Suma! Impy! We did pictures of what we loved most and look what we painted.”

Gem and Jimmy showed them the painting. To be honest, both were very splodgy and it was impossible to figure out what any of it was.

“Woah, that’s a lot of paint!” Impulse grinned as he looked, pretending he knew exactly what he was looking at. “Tell us all about it.”

Gem handed hers to Impulse. You could just about make out three figures. People probably. Two short figures and a tall one.

Jimmy explained his. There were more splodgy people on his. The longer they looked, the more they could figure out the shapes. “That’s Suma, and that’s Martyn, G and Pearly, and that one is Falsie, that one is Norman and Woody, and that one is Gem and Impy.”

“It looks really good Jimmy. Shall we put it on the fridge when we get home?” Suma asked.

Jimmy nodded.

“Aww, I’m in your picture Jimmy?” Impulse asked, touched. Actually, if he wasn’t in front of the kids, he would overreact because he made it into two children’s pictures of ‘what they loved most.’ “What about you Gemmy? This is amazing.”

Gem smiled a little. “Me, you and Jimmy.”

Impulse wondered if parenting would always melt his heart. “It’s beautiful Gem. Definitely going onto the fridge.”

Pearl and Grian finally came out of school. They had stayed behind to read their apologies to Mrs. Humfrey.

Jimmy waved at them and turned to Impy and Xisuma. “I put you on my ‘things I love most’ painting cus I love you the most!”

Both their hearts had melted into puddles. Impulse and Xisuma quickly looked at each other almost grinning.

The twins arrived at them, both in bad moods, which was understandable.

“You took forever!” Jimmy jumped up and down a few times. How he was still full of energy after school was anyone’s guess.

Pearl shrugged but pulled her little brother into a hug. He didn’t need to know anything was wrong.

Gem took her foster dad’s hand. “Impy?” She looked up at him.

“Yes sweetie?” He gave her his full attention as they all made their way to the gate.

She thought for a moment. “Would I be on your painting too?”

It took a second to get what she meant. “Of course Gem. You would be on my painting.”

“Would Jimmy?” Gem asked.

Now, such a thought would have to be thought in more detail later. Preferably on the sofa with Xisuma drinking coffee whilst the kids were at school, as they both had fallen in love with parenting their foster children. “Yes, Jimmy would be on my painting too.”

Jimmy hadn’t heard that. He was showing his brother and sister his painting, but Xisuma had heard. Yes, a lot of conversation had to be had in the future. For now, X had to talk to Grian and Pearl.

It wouldn’t be an easy one.

-

Xisuma sat them down once he made sure Jimmy was alright playing upstairs. He’d made them all drinks and an after-school snack to keep them watered and fed until dinner. Nothing fancy. Just some juice and apple slices.

“Something happened.” X started. “I’m not sure what, but I know there’s a deeper reason why you did what you did. Now I know it wasn’t the biggest thing in the world, but I feel like you two are going to keep pushing until something happens. Am I right?”

That was the general idea. Pearl nodded a little and hid her face behind a sip of juice.

He felt he understood a little more. “I guess it’s going to be hard to talk about, but I would like it if you told me why you thought you needed to do this.” Again, he kept his voice calm. “Please.”

They didn’t answer.

“Maybe if I guessed some things, you could nod or shake your heads to see if I’m getting closer to the truth. That might make it easier.” Xisuma said.

They nodded.

Xisuma had his suspicions about this, so he was going to go right to it. “Is this about me asking about Adopting you?”

The pause was long, but they answered with a nod.

“Ok.” His suspicions were confirmed. “Were you worried I’d change my mind?”

Grian shrugged.

Pearl hesitated before speaking. “Didn’t want you to act like you cared and then through us out. Thought if we did this, then if you threw us out then it wouldn’t hurt so bad.”

That made a lot of sense. “I see. Pearl, Grian. I know it is hard to believe, but I promise you I will care about you for as long as I can. Which will be until I’m old and grey in a hundred years’ time or something. I’ll never kick you out. This is your forever home, even if you decide to move out when you’re older.”

Pause.

“Jimmy painted a picture of everyone he loved.” Pearl said, trying so hard not to cry. “Would we…?”

Xisuma didn’t mean to cut her off, but he needed them to know. He got off his sofa and sat next to them on their sofa. “Both of you would be on my picture. You two, Jimmy and Martyn would be on my picture, and it would stay on the fridge forever.” He tried to stop himself getting over emotional. “All four of you came into my life, and I will love and protect you for as long as I can, whether as your foster

parent, or your dad. That is your decision."

They couldn't keep it together any longer. They couldn't remember the last time another adult had said something like this to them. Tears rolled down their faces. They fell into his arms and Xisuma held them tight. "I love you all so much." Xisuma felt his own eyes water.

"I want you to be my dad." Pearl whispered.

"Of course I will be." He spoke.

Grian didn't speak right away. "Can I think more?"

"Take as long as you need." X kissed the tops of their heads. He reached over to the coffee table for the box of tissues. "Here you go. See? How are you both feeling now?"

"Bit better." G said.

Pearl nodded in agreement. "Should do homework."

Xisuma got up. "Yes, alright. I should start dinner. Call me if you two need anything ok? I'll be in the kitchen." He left them.

The siblings looked at each other, silently wondering what to do now.

"You really trust him?" Grian asked her.

Pearl nodded. "Think so." She wiped her eyes. "I just want a grown up to love us and I think Suma does."

"Yeah." He sat back and thought more. "Suma wasn't even mad."

"He was a little bit." Pearl said. "But, not shouty."

Grian agreed. "I suppose. I really want him to be. I miss having a parent. I love Martyn, but he's, our brother."

"Yeah." Pearl said. "Think Jimmy will say yes?"

G shrugged. "Probably has already."

But Jimmy hadn't. Of course, he wanted Suma to be his dad, but his stomach felt sick every time he thought about it. Instead, he distracted himself with playing.

-

In fact, it took two years for Jimmy to talk to someone about it. Pearl and Grian had accepted the adoption, and Jimmy wanted to desperately. But the more time he spent with Impulse and Gem, the more he...

Jimmy was stuck in the middle of two happinesses.

-

Jimmy, Gem and False lay on their backs in the school field on their last day of year three. Even two years later, they were on their own, but they liked it like that. Gem and Jimmy were nine now and False would follow them in a couple of days.

“Jim?” False said, breaking their game of finding shapes in the clouds.

He looked over. “Mm?”

“Why don’t you let Xisuma adopt you?” She asked.

“Oh.” Jimmy shrugged. “Just, thinking about it.”

Gem turned her head, frowning. “It’s been years. That’s almost forever.”

Jimmy closed his eyes. “I don’t know Gem.”

“It’s not like you don’t want him to be your dad. I know you do.” Gem continued.

Jimmy sighed and sat up. “What about you and Impy?”

Gem followed him with sitting. “And? What about *you* and Impy?”

False looked at them both, not sitting up. “Guys. I love you, but I think you both need to sort this out now.”

They stopped.

“They love you. You love them.” She went back to looking at clouds.

Gem laid down. “Hate talking.”

“But you gotta.” False told them.

“Why hasn’t Impy asked you yet?” Jimmy asked.

Gem huffed. “He has. M just.” She paused. “Last time I had a dad, he left me by myself so he could kill someone.”

That had been the first time either of them had heard the real reason why Gem had to come to the Uk.

“Oh.”

Gem nodded a little. “I know Impy is different.”

There was silence between them. False got up. “I need a drink. Will be back.” She left them.

“Jimmy.” Gem turned to her friend. “Do you think, we should talk to Impy and Suma?”

Jimmy shrugged. “You can if you want. You deserve Impy to be your dad.”

“Impy can be your dad too.” Gem said, after a thought.

He shook his head. “Can’t Gem. Suma and Pearl and G will be sad.”

She didn’t know what to say.

False came back and they went back to cloud watching.

-

Impulse and Xisuma met Gem and Jimmy at the school gates, ready to take them home. “Hey Gem! Hey Jimmy!” Impulse greeted them both.

“Hello you two.” Xisuma smiled. “Jimmy, it’s just us today. Grian and Pearl are staying over with Mumbo, Shelby and Joel.”

Jimmy smiled a little. “Ok. Can we watch toy story today?”

“Of course we can. First, we need to go shopping.” X said.

Jim nodded and hugged Gem and Impulse. “See you.”

“Bye Jimmy.” Gem hugged him back,

Jimmy went with Xisuma and he got into the car. He wasn’t tall

enough not to use a booster seat yet.

“How was school?” X asked, getting into the driver’s seat.

“Fine.” He looked out the window. It had been fine, just the things on his mind were eating him up.

X looked in the mirror back at the boy. Of course he’d noticed something was up. “Do you want to talk about this now, or back at home?”

“Suma.” He whispered. “I.”

He let him talk at his own pace.

“Are you still allowed to be my daddy?” Jimmy asked.

“Yeah, of course.” Oh, so this is what it was about.

It took a moment for Jim to figure out the words. “But I want Impy to be too. I want you both to be, but I thought you’d be sad about it.”

Chapter End Notes

> You know what, reading it through again, it wasn't as bad as I thought it was :)
>
> Here's my discord group link. It is mostly just to talk about MCYT but there is a doctor who and gaming section too if you are a fan :)
>
> https://discord.gg/MwtwWxzq

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tango opened the curtains to let the morning light into Jimmy's room. "Jimmy?" He came back to sit on the bed to kiss him awake. "Honey, your dad phoned."

Jimmy's eyes flickered open. "Mm?" He hummed, rolling over to bury his face into the pillow. "So early."

Tango ran his fingers through his hair. "They want to spend time with you. When was the last time you saw them?"

He shrugged. "They come over." Jimmy rolled back around to face him. His eyes squinted in the light. "Time is it?"

"Ten. Come on, let's get breakfast and get dressed." Tango told him.

Jimmy rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. "But you don't eat breakfast."

"I know, but it might be good for us if we eat before we travel." Tango took his hand and kissed the back of it.

Jimmy sat up. "But I don't want to go anywhere."

Tango held his hand. "Trust me? I promise you'll enjoy it. If not, then we can come back."

He contemplated. Jimmy *did* miss his family. "Is it just Dad? You said they."

"Your whole family?" Tango said. "I don't know if it'll be too overwhelming."

Jimmy sighed and shook his head. "It's fine, Tango. I'll try." He was torn in the middle. For one thing, seeing his family would be the most amazing thing ever, on the other hand, Jimmy didn't have the motivation to leave the house and deal with people.

"I'll make you something to eat. Toast?" Tango stepped off the bed.

Jimmy nodded. "Thanks."

Tango smiled and left the room.

Jimmy took a minute to get out of bed, trying his hardest not to use all his energy to do so. He put on some comfy jeans and a fan made Decked Out hoodie he'd found on Red Bubble.

This was going to be a tiring day.

-

After breakfast, they finished getting ready and went outside to the bus stop.

"Your buses are strange." Tango said as they waited at the stand, his money ready. "I was expecting the red kind."

Jimmy shrugged. "Yours are yellow." He had his hood up.

"Only the school buses." Tango looked at the timetable, which was stationed on a streetlight post. "How are you doing?"

"Fine." Jimmy quickly checked his phone.

The bus rolled down the road towards them and slowed down at their stop. One person got off and they got on. They paid and found some seats at the back. "You'll like dad's house. It's a nice area."

"Why do you call Impulse your dad and not Xisuma?" Tango asked.

Jimmy rested his head against the bus wall. "Just worked out like that. They're still both my dad."

"Fair." Tango looked out the window. The world here was different from what he was used to.

Jimmy reached for his hand and took it, setting their hands on his lap.

-

When they arrived, everyone was there, just as Tango had said. Cars were parked on the drive and Jimmy recognised them all. Even Lizzie was here. He wondered if Joel and Hermes were too.

Tango knocked on the door for them and seconds later, Impulse answered.

“Hi dad.” Jimmy smiled a little.

“Oh Jimmy.” Impulse hugged his son close to him.

Jimmy hugged him back. “Dad, you saw me like the other day.”

Impulse didn’t let go. “I know, but you’re here. Outside and everything.” He finally let go. “Let’s get you two inside. I’ll make you something warm to drink. It’s freezing out here.” He looked at Tango. “I hope you packed a lot of sweaters. Nice to see you again.”

Tango smiled slightly. “You too.” He closed the door behind them once they were inside.

Jimmy took his shoes and coat off and put them neatly by the door. “Everyone in the living room?”

“Yep.” Impulse said. “Tango, could you help me with a few things, please?”

Tango nodded and followed him into the kitchen.

Jimmy walked into the living room. There they all were. His family.

He quietly sat next to Xisuma and rested his head on his dad’s shoulder. Jimmy needed to get used to the noise again.

Xisuma squeezed his hand but kept talking to Pearl about her job.

“Uncle Jimmy!” Hermes jumped up from the other side of the room.

Joel pulled the little boy on his lap, and Hermes squealed. “In a second, lad. Jimmy’s only just walked in.”

The noise was almost unbearable, both inside his head and in the room. Jimmy tried to balance them out. He sat in his mind for a moment to work it all out.

The living room door opened, and Impulse and Tango came in. The former sat next to Jim and the latter sat on the floor in front of him, leaning back on his legs, head rested on his thigh.

It helped somehow.

“Dad, False said she’s moving back.” Gem came in, holding her phone.

Jimmy opened his eyes. “What?”

Gem sat by Pearl. “She just texted.” Gem spotted her brother. “Hi Jimmy.”

He sighed and closed his eyes tighter. “But why?”

“Not hello Gem?” Gem put her phone on the floor.

“Hi.” Jimmy said, sitting up straight but not moving too much in case he kicked Tango. “This feels like an intervention.”

“It is.” Grian said. “Go back to therapy.”

Jimmy snorted a laugh. “Look, this will be over in a couple of weeks.”

“What about medicine?” Lizzie suggested.

He shook his head. “Gross. As I said. I’ll be fine in a bit.” Jimmy looked around the room at his family. “It’s not like you lot aren’t going through this too.”

“Yes, and we’re not the ones suffering at the moment.” Pearl told him. “You do the same for us when we’re having bad times. Why aren’t we allowed to help you?”

Jimmy shrugged. “Don’t know.”

Grian decided to change the subject. “Scar said editing is going well. Might get the next season out sooner than later.”

“When it comes out, we can have a massive celebration.” Xisuma told them. “Have you watched any of the show Tango?”

Tango nodded. “Yes, the first season. It’s so good.”

Jimmy smiled. He was glad his Rancher liked the show he loved.

Damn, this was exhausting. “I’m going to go upstairs.” Jimmy said.

Tango looked up at him. “Need me to come with you, Love?”

He shook his head and got up. “I’ll be ok.” Jimmy left the room and headed upstairs.

Tango watched him go and sighed inwardly.

Gem stared at the blonde for a second. “Strange question, but have I ever met you?”

“You might’ve.” Impulse said. “For a moment when I was showing you around the shop in Arizona.”

“That’s weird.” Gem said.

Tango agreed. “It is weird. I never normally think about those days, but they were kinda strange.”

“Strange?” Impulse asked.

He got onto the sofa. “I don’t know; I was staying around Skizz’s, and the police came around a few times after you’d left.”

“Huh.” Impulse thought about it. “They must’ve thought I’d kidnapped Gem.”

Gem laughed slightly. “I mean, you did.”

“I was allowed to. It’s not kidnapping if I was given permission.” Impulse said. “Although, something tells me I’d be arrested if I ever stepped back into the US again.”

Xisuma, often wondered the full truth of his friend’s escape out of the states. He knew most of it, but there were still some missing details. Gem’s family had definitely been some dangerous people. It was good she was safe here. “Don’t go to the US then mate.”

“I wasn’t gonna.” Impulse snorted. The other’s in the room started to have their own conversations. “Tango, how’s Skizz?”

Tango thought for a moment. “He’s good. I see him occasionally.”

Impulse smiled. It was no secret that he missed his best friend. Skizz had just never been able to come over and Impulse obviously couldn’t go back to the States.

-

Pearl and Gem got up from the floor and went upstairs to check on Jimmy.

-

“So, you’re Timmy’s boyfriend.” Grian looked at him with narrowed

eyes.

Tango nodded. “We haven’t really put a label on it, but yeah.”

Grian stood with an empty cup. “Don’t hurt him.” He left the room.

The doorbell rang, and Impulse went to answer it.

Tango observed everyone. “Big family.”

“Used to be a lot smaller.” Martyn answered.

“Jimmy hasn’t told me much about it. Which is fair.” Tango said.

Martyn understood. “There’s a lot of story to get through.”

Tango had a feeling there would be.

-

Impulse opened the door with no idea of who it could be.

“Hey Homie Buddeh.”

Impulse’s mouth opened wide like a fish. “Skizz! What are you doing here!?”

“Well, Tango Top came and I thought, ‘You know what? I haven’t seen my best Buddie for a while, so I booked a flight.” Skizz smiled.

Impulse didn’t know what to say, so he said nothing. He let his best friend inside.

-

Jimmy was on his old bed with his sisters, playing a game together on their phones.

“So, you really like Tango then?” Gem asked him.

He nodded. “Definitely.” Jimmy told her.

“I’m really proud of you, Jim.” Pearl smiled.

“Thanks.” Jimmy focused on his game. “Did I tell you that he’s the founder of Decked Out?”

“Yes.” Gem answered at the same time Pearl looked up from her

phone and went, “What!?”

He wasn’t surprised that at least one of his sisters knew.

-

That night Jimmy stood at the door to his bedroom and watched Tango faff about with his suitcase. “Are, are you leaving?”

Tango looked up. “No, I’m just sorting my clothes out.”

He nodded.

“Why?” Tango got up from the carpeted floor.

Jimmy shrugged and left the room.

June 2011

The car was silent. Xisuma turned the keys, turning the engine on. He saw Impulse’s car was still in the car park too. “Jimmy.” He wasn’t too sure what to tell him. “I can’t say for certain what Impulse would say to that. This is something you need to talk to him about.”

Jimmy didn’t really like the sound of that. He was surely going to get told ‘no’ and never get to see Gem and Impulse again.

“They’re still in the car park. We can see if they want to stay for dinner. We have sausages that need eating.” Xisuma told him.

The boy shook his head. ”Impy will say no. He won’t want me.”

Xisuma turned the car off. “Sometimes, we have to take a leap of faith. Sometimes, we have to do tricky things in order to get what we seek out for. I understand it’s scary, and we don’t have to do it today, but I think it will be a good thing to do.”

Jimmy nodded. “Ok.” He whispered, wiping his nose on his sleeve. “But are you sad?”

He’d forgotten to answer that. “Gosh, no Jimmy, of course this wouldn’t make me sad.” Xisuma got out his phone and sent a text to Impulse, asking if they wanted to come over for tea. “I’ve asked if they want to come for tea.”

“Ok.” Jimmy rested his head against the back of the seat. “Ok.” He sniffed and wiped his watery eyes with his fist.

Xisuma got a message back from Impulse. “They’re coming for dinner.” He hoped it was the right choice. “Then we can talk to them about it.”

Jimmy didn’t answer back. He had that sickness in his stomach back again. He found it unpleasant.

X started up the car again and drove out of the car park, taking a right turn and heading for home. “Martyn’s coming tomorrow.”

The boy smiled.

-

Xisuma parked the car in his drive and Impulse parked behind him. They got out of the car; Gem running over with a grin on her face. “Jimmy! We get to have dinner together!”

Jimmy nodded. “Yeah.”

They went inside to play.

Impulse had noticed Jimmy’s eyes were red. “Is everything ok?” He asked X.

Xisuma shook his head, putting his key’s safe. “We had a hard conversation in the car. There’s something we need to talk to you about.”

“Do you want to talk about it now or?” Impulse’s sentence trailed off.

The children had gone upstairs to play in Jimmy’s room.

Xisuma took Impulse into the Kitchen. “Well, he told me he wanted me to adopt him.” He put the kettle on.

Impulse sat at the kitchen table. “I’d wondered when he would. Why did he take so long deciding?”

“Because he wants you to be dad too.” X turned to look at him.

Impulse’s eyes widened. “Oh.”

Sighing, Xisuma got the milk out of the fridge. “I’m kicking myself

that I didn't pick this up before now, and he's been sitting with this for two years."

"Don't blame yourself X." Impulse told him.

He poured the boiling water into the mugs and added a splash of milk to each. "I'm literally his dad. Not legally yet, but I should've seen it."

"Jimmy's good at hiding things." Impulse said after a moment.

X stirred the tea with a spoon. "He's nine. He shouldn't have to hide things."

Impulse sipped the brew. "These kids have been through a lot."

"I know." X waited before drinking his. "So, Jimmy's going to ask you. I don't know your thoughts on this, but if you don't want this, then we can re-plan."

A few seconds passed before he answered. "He's a good kid."

"He is." Xisuma sipped his and put it on the counter.

"How would it happen? I don't think we can both legally adopt him." Impulse asked.

Xisuma shrugged. "We'll work through that if it comes to it." He thought. "Ok, put it like this. When you see him, do you see him as Gem's friend, or do you see him like you see Gem?"

His posture slumped ever so slightly. "Like I see Gem, but I don't want to take him from you."

"You won't be." Xisuma sat in the chair next to his. "At the end of the day, he wants both of us to be his dad's, and we can do that. One of us will be his legal parent, and it doesn't matter who. As long as we both promise to be there for him."

There seemed to be something else on Impulse's mind. "I don't know if I can. Gem hasn't said if she wants to be adopted or not, and it seems wrong to be Jimmy's dad and not Gem's."

"I see." X remembered he'd left his mug on the side. "I think we need to have a really big talk. Sooner the better."

-

Gem and Jimmy sat on the stairs, listening to their conversation. The door was open, so it was easy to hear. They looked at one another and quietly made their way upstairs again. Gem sat on her friend's bed. "Pearl not here?"

"Sleepover." He spoke.

"Oh yeah." She picked up Norman and looked at him. "Seems silly."

He nodded. "A bit."

Gem passed him over to Jimmy. "Norman will know what to do."

Jimmy took him and held him tight. "Norman doesn't speak. He used to, but now he just listens."

She scooted onto the floor. "Impy seemed sad."

"I don't think he wants to be my dad." Jimmy sighed.

"I don't remember him saying that." Gem told him.

Jimmy shrugged. "But what if he says no."

Gem sighed in exasperation. "But he won't."

The conversation stopped there.

-

After dinner; a lovely spread of sausage and mash, the four of them sat in the living room, ready for their much-needed conversation. The adults sat together on one sofa, and the children on the other, still in their school uniforms.

"Ok, we've had a talk." X started.

"We know. We listened on the stairs." The words escaped Jimmy before he could stop them.

Funnily, this made everything easier to talk about.

Impulse turned looked at them both. "Ok. Gem, what do you think?"

Gem shrugged. "Jimmy wants you both to be his dads. So be his dads."

“But only if you want to be.” Jimmy finished.

The adults face softened. “Jimmy.” Impulse started. “Look. I want to be a dad to both you and Gem and I,” He couldn’t finish. Jimmy had launched himself into his arms. Those words. They killed everything Jimmy had been afraid of.

Impulse hugged him back. He looked at Gem and smiled, reassuring her.

She took a breath and closed her eyes, trying to get the words out. “I want you to be my dad too please.”

“I would love to be.” Impulse smiled wide.

Gem opened one of her eyes to assess the room. Everything was ok. She got up and went to hug Impulse too. Gem sighed in relief. She trusted her dad to look after her. “Jimmy, you’re my brother now.”

Jimmy giggle a bit.

Xisuma watched them. That had been easier than he’d expected. His phone pinged. It was Pearl.

-

Pearl: Dad, G slid down the stairs on a mattress and hit his head.

Pearl: He’s laughing about it

Pearl: Think he’s gone crazy

Dad: What did he hit his head on?

Pearl: Mumbo’s dad’s hat stand.

Pearl: Think he broke it.

Pearl: The hat stand, not his head.

Dad: Need me to come?

Pearl: Nope :)

Dad: Alright but tell me if it gets worse.

Pearl: Ok. Love you dad 😊

Dad: Love you too. Send the message over to your brother.

General Time Zoom

Over the course of the next few years, the children grew up with parents who loved them.

Soon enough, Jimmy, Gem and False finished Primary school and started high school. They stood at the gates together, their blazer's three sizes too big for them and their shoes new and shiny.

Jimmy looked up at his brother and sister who were ready to start year 11.

"You'll be fine." Grian told the younger three. "It's just school, but bigger."

He turned to the massive building in front of them. "I'm gonna get lost!"

Pearl reached into his bag and handed him his handbook. "This is why they give out maps Jimmy. You'll be fine, I promise." She smiled.

Jimmy nodded. "Right." He studied his map.

The bell rang. The year Seven's had to go to the hall so they could get sorted into their forms.

"I wonder if it will be like Hogwarts?" Gem said. "Pearl said they have houses."

False shrugged. "Harry Potter didn't invent schoolhouses Gem. We just have them. Apparently primary schools do to, just we didn't."

They sat together in the hall. It was already full of new students. Jimmy recognised a few class members from Primary school, but no one went to talk to them. It had always been the three of them against the rest of the class.

"I want to be in red house." Gem said. "I like red."

Jimmy just hoped they'd be together. He hadn't been by himself since before Xisuma had taken them in.

That seemed so long ago now.

Hang on.

“What’s so funny?” False asked.

“Just, I’ve been with living with Suma almost as long as I lived without him.” He grinned.

That was the same for Gem too. “Weird.”

The head teacher came onto the stage, reminding Jimmy of a rooster. Chest out and ego high.

“Good morning year sevens.” The man looked around the room. “I’ll be reading off your names and your forms. Once you hear your name, please make your way towards your form tutor.

This was going to be a long morning.

To Gem’s delight, high school, so far seemed a lot like Hogwarts. Her name was read off. “I’m a Gryffindor!” She jumped off her chair and waved at her best friends before leaving them. They had planned to meet up at lunch.

Jimmy looked at False. “We’re all going to be split up, aren’t we.”

“I think so.” False sighed.

In the end, False got put into ‘Green’ house, and Jimmy was put into ‘Yellow.’ They said ‘goodbye’ to each other and went separate ends of the hall.

At some point, Jimmy and a few others were led to a science room, which turned out to be their form room too. He didn’t know anyone.

“Elizabeth, you know you’re not allowed pink hair in school.” The teacher said to a girl a few tables behind him.

“Sorry Miss, it didn’t wash out in time.”

Jimmy thought she was a few years older.

The teacher took the register.

Why couldn’t he be in form with Pearl or Grian? This wasn’t fair at all. Jimmy zoned out a little. None of this was fair.

A new place, with no one he knew. Alone. Always alone.

“Jimmy Solidarity.” The teacher called.

“Here Miss.” Jimmy went back to zoning out. That was until the stool next to him scraped along the ground and someone sat next to him. He turned. It was the girl with pink hair.

“Your name’s Jimmy Solidarity.” She spoke.

Jimmy blinked and nodded.

The girl smiled reassuringly. “It’s alright. I was just curious is all. I’m Lizzie.”

She didn’t seem *too* scary. “I’m Jimmy.”

Lizzie laughed slightly. “I know.” Her face turned more serious. “For um, context. My name is Lizzie Shadow-Solidarity, and there aren’t many ‘Solidarity’s’ around here. What year were you born?”

“2002.” He said, unsure about all this.

Lizzie thought about it. “I was born in 2000.” She said. “Your dad.” She paused.

“Which one?” Jimmy asked. “I have a few.”

“Bio?” Lizzie asked. “Sorry, I was just seeing if we were related. My dad buggered off when I was a baby, and I heard your name and thought ‘wouldn’t it be fun if I had a little brother.’ But I’m sure there are a lot of Solidarity’s around.”

“He left when I was little. Don’t remember him much.” Jimmy said. “Might ask my big brother. He knows things.”

She shrugged. “Well, if you have a big brother.”

“Different dad.” Jimmy said. “Martyn’s died. Pearl and Grian’s went away and so did mine.”

Her eyes widened. “Pearl and Grian are your brother and sister?”

Jimmy nodded.

“Woah, you’re lucky. They’re popular.” Lizzie said. “Very popular for theatre kids too.”

He smiled. His brother had got into acting lately. Pearl enjoyed it too, but mostly just for fun. “Drama sounds fun.”

“Taking after your brother then?” Lizzie asked and looked back at her friends. “Jimmy, you don’t so happen to know if Joel Beans is single, do you?”

Jimmy giggled. “Might be.”

“I know he’s a year eleven, but he’s so cool.” Lizzie said. “Right, good talking with you Jimmy.” Lizzie left and went to sit with her friends, which left Jimmy alone again.

-

It turned out that Gem was in the same form as Pearl.

Jimmy was just glad one of them had something.

-

At the end of the week, the three of them made a table of ‘the best subjects’ on Impulse’s dining room table. They had sheets and sheets of paper.

“Jimmy, are you staying with Suma on Monday?” False asked.

Jimmy nodded. “Yep. All week. Then I’m coming back to Impy’s the week after.” He didn’t mind this arrangement. It meant he got time with all his family. “Oh! Martyn said that my bio dad actually had a whole family before he had me! So that year nine in my form could be my sister.”

Gem raised an eyebrow. “Jimmy your family is getting huge!”

“Doesn’t have to be just my family.” He spoke. “All our family.”

False smiled. “As long as we still get to be your besties.”

Jimmy nodded. “Falsie, you and Gem are always going to be my besties.”

False one arm hugged him. “Good.”

They carried on making their tables. Jimmy put ‘Drama’ at the top of his. It was his favourite so far.

Chapter End Notes

I am so so sorry for the next chapter...

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Warning for strong mental health scenes and implied SH

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The calendar, which hung from a single nail above the hallway table, showed it was September when, in fact, it was coming towards the end of October. Jimmy turned the calendar over, showing fan art of Deepfrost Citadel. Today was Monday.

His eyes scanned down the days and the weeks until they found the right day. “Huh.” Jimmy pushed himself off the wall and went to the kitchen, where he found Tango sketching something.

Tango glanced up for a second. “Ok?”

Jimmy hummed and sat next to him, trying to peek over at the paper.

Tango hid it with his hand. “No peaking.”

He sat back in the chair. Jimmy really needed to get new ones. The wood always cut into his back. “Been seventeen years since Xisuma took me in.”

Tango’s pencil hovered over the page. “Want to talk about it?”

Jimmy nodded. “Probably should. You deserve to know.”

“You don’t have to tell me anything if you don’t want to.” Tango closed his book and gave Jimmy his full attention.

He moved his sleeves over his fingers. “I don’t remember life before it too much.” Jimmy took a breath. “Ok. Well, we had a neighbour called Mrs Cox, and she hated children. Us, more specifically.”

Tango listened, taking one of his sleeved hands.

Jimmy told him the story of what had happened at home and how they only had time to pack stuff in their backpacks. How they hadn’t trusted Xisuma at first but in the end had slowly warmed up to him. “Yeah, it took me two years after the others to get adopted. It started

with living with one or the other a week at a time, but then I decided to stay most of my time with Impy. I think, because I knew Suma still wanted to be open for any emergency foster placements to stay with him, and I didn't mind. I still had my room there."

Tango didn't answer for a second. "You've been through some things."

He laughed slightly. "You could say that. And that's not even telling you what happened with False." Jimmy's smile fell. "Maybe I'll leave that for another day. It still. It still hurts a bit."

Tango squeezed his hand. "That is perfectly fine."

Jimmy stared at their hands and sighed. "You have to go back soon, don't you?"

"Yeah. I'm thinking of going back when Skizz goes." Tango said.

His heart ached. "It was always going to happen."

Tango nodded. "Yeah."

A fog of melancholy hung in the air between them; both had the thought of them being apart in their minds.

"I don't want you to go," Jimmy whispered.

"I don't want to go either." Tango told him.

Jimmy looked up at him. "Then stay."

Tango paused. "I can't. I know I can work remotely and things, but I can't just up and go. I need to plan things, set things up." He saw his face. "But don't think I'm staying away for long. I'll come back."

"When?" Jimmy asked.

"I don't know." The silence was stifling. "But." Tango thought of the words. "Setting up an office in London wouldn't be bad."

"But you like Arizona," Jimmy told him.

Tango scooted closer, the chair scraping against the floor. "Yeah, I like Arizona. But I love you."

Don't cry, don't cry.

“Jimmy.”

“What about Skizz?” Jimmy asked.

Tango stood and wrapped his arms around him. “Skizz missed Impulse; I wouldn’t be surprised if he moved here. There’s nothing else in Arizona. No other family or anything. Just the shop that’s losing customers. The company that I can be here for, and the company I can make in London.”

Jimmy rested his head on his stomach. “So, you’re coming back?”

“I’m coming back.” He carded his fingers through his hair. “I’m coming back, Jimmy.”

Jimmy took a shaky breath. “Why does everything hurt?”

“Because your brain is being mean to you.” Tango didn’t let go.

He nodded. “Scar wants to shoot the next season soon.”

“That’s good.” Tango was still excited to see Jimmy in a show. “Will you be up for it?”

“I have to be,” Jimmy said. “It’s my job. Would like a little normalcy too.”

Tango leant down and kissed his head.

Jimmy caught his face and leant up for a kiss on his lips. “Apparently, it’s quite emotional so, should be able to tap into some emotional memory.”

“Is that like feeling feelings, you’ve already felt?” Tango asked.

He nodded. “Using past experiences to help feel what your character is feeling. I love acting. You get to be other people.”

“I see.” Tango thought.

“Can I see what you were drawing?” Jimmy asked.

“Nope.” Tango went back to sit down, smirk on his face, like he was keeping a dark secret.

Jimmy stood, a smile on his face. “I’m going to get stuff from the shops. Want to come with?”

Tango had work to do. “Yeah of course. Let me get my coat.” He still wasn’t used to the cold temperatures yet.

-

Impulse sat with his best friend, still shocked he was there. “I have to be honest. Never thought I’d ever see you again.”

“I should’ve come years ago.” Skizz sipped his coffee. “With Tango too. I’m surprised he remembers you.”

“It was a little surprising, yeah.” Impulse put his mug on the coffee table. “I’m just glad you got to see the kids. Well, they’ve grown up now, but still.”

Skizz smiled. “Dippledop, your kids are amazing.”

“Thanks.” Impulse sat back on the sofa. “So, how are you enjoying England?”

“It’s cold.”

They laughed.

-

“Please stay.” Jimmy asked Tango. It was the night before his flight back to Arizona. Tango’s bags were packed and ready by the door, and the taxi was booked to pick him up at five the next morning. Jimmy had his hand cupping Tango’s face. He didn’t want to let him go.

“I’ll be back.” Tango put his hand over Jimmy’s.

“Gonna miss you so much.” Jimmy whispered.

Tango felt his heart breaking. He didn’t want to leave him. “I’ll miss you too.”

Jimmy swallowed the lump in his throat. “Have you booked the flights back yet?”

“I’ll do it when I get back.” It was late. “Jimmy, don’t be alone when I go.”

“How?” he asked.

“Go to your dad’s. Or someone.” Tango told him. “Please. You

shouldn't be alone."

Jimmy laid his head on the pillow. "Alright..."

Tango kissed his head. "Promise?"

"Promise."

September 2014

Jimmy, False and Gem had been at high school for a week now. Obviously, this meant they were professionals.

Surely.

False had been ten minutes late to three different lessons because she'd got lost, finding herself at opposite ends of the school. Jimmy had turned up to his brother's drama class and his sister's maths class before realising he was reading the wrong week of his timetable. Gem had still thought she needed to carry her P.E. kit with her every day before Pearl told her she didn't have to.

A few girls in Gem's English classed teased her because of her accent, calling her 'American', but they immediately stopped when she said, "It's embarrassing that you don't know the difference between America and Canada."

Gem sat in form. She didn't really want to make friends with the others in her year. They didn't seem worth her time. For the first five minutes, Gem watched Pearl talk with her classmates. She knew they weren't friends. Not good friends anyway.

"They're year elevens." Someone whispered in her ear.

Gem looked at them. "I know; I have eyes."

"You keep looking at them." Her classmate said in a whiny voice. "You're supposed to talk with other year sevens."

"Pearl's my best friend, actually." This person was getting on her nerves. It wasn't that Gem couldn't make new friends; it was just that they weren't Jimmy or False. She wondered if Pearl would let her sit with her.

Gem got off her chair and came over. “Hi.”

The year elevens looked at her like she was a mouse. Not Pearl though. “Hi Gem! Did you want to sit with us?”

The people Pearl was sitting next to were appalled with this offer. “But she’s a year seven.”

Pearl shrugged. “We were year sevens once too. Anyway, I’ve known Gem longer than I’ve known you. Since she was a baby.”

“Six.” Gem corrected, sitting next to her.

“Same difference.” Pearl grinned. “How’s school going?”

Gem shrugged. “Ok. It’s big. I’m glad I have most my lessons with Jimmy and False.”

Pearls friends sulked, but Pearl wasn’t going to let them. “Yeah, so Gem’s actually my little brothers, sister.”

“Oh, so she’s one of those Foster kids then.” They rolled their eyes.

Pearl’s eyes narrowed. “I think you should watch your tone. Remember what happened to Jaz last year? You know. Last time someone said something about the people I care about?”

They paled.

“Say sorry.” Pearl told them.

“Sorry.” They muttered.

Pearl smiled, pleased her message had got across. “What lessons do you have today, Gem?”

“Um.” She looked at her timetable. “Music, Math, Math, Biology and P.E.”

“Fifth period is the best time to have P.E.” Pearl told her.

Gem smiled. “Yeah, G said the same yesterday.”

-

Meanwhile, Jimmy was getting up the courage to speak to Lizzie. He wanted to tell her the information Martyn had come up with. Jimmy

scooted off his chair and went to the group of year nines, where Lizzie sat.

“Oh, hi Jimmy.” Lizzie smiled.

“Martyn, my oldest brother, said that my dad did have a family before he met my mother.” The words rushed out of his mouth.

Her smile turned into a grin. “You must be my little brother then!”

Jimmy hadn’t known what to expect when he told her, but he was happy this was her reaction. A small smile rose on his face.

One of Lizzie’s friends looked between them. “I mean, you look similar.”

Lizzie seemed pleased with this. “That’s so cool, though. I’ve always wanted a sibling.”

“You’ll have to share with, four other people.” Jimmy told her.

“That’s ok Jimmy.”

Glad he had the courage to tell her; Jimmy went back to his table. School was fun.

-

“Hi dad. Hi dad.” Jimmy hugged both his dads. Both had come to pick the children up. There was a fair in the next village over, and they wanted to go.

Pearl took her hair out of her ponytail.

Grian came over after saying goodbye to Mumbo.

“Dad, I found out that my biological dad had a daughter before having me, and she’s in my form.” Jimmy told them.

“That’s great son.” Impulse answered.

Xisuma was doing a head count of their kids. “Alright, we both have our cars. Get in a car and we’ll go to the Fair.”

“Will there be rides?” False asked.

“Should be.” X said. “Alright, Pearl, G, either of you want to bring a

friend?"

They shook their heads. "I think Joel's going anyway."

After a few more checks, they got into the cars; Jimmy, Gem and False going with X and Pearl and Grian going with Impulse.

The Fair wasn't too Fair away. Cars were already lined up on the grassy car parks. There were tons of stalls, games and rides to choose from. Everything was probably overly expensive for the quality, but it would be a bit of fun. Later, they were going to have hot dogs at Impulse's.

"Where are we going to go first?" Jimmy asked.

"I say, hook a duck." False said. "I've been practicing." She rolled up her sleeves.

"They are going to take *all* of your money Falsie." Gem told her as the three of them ran off.

They found the duck stand. "I am a professional."

Jimmy couldn't help but laugh. Gosh he loved his friends.

-

Months passed, and Jimmy couldn't help but think that his mind wasn't wired properly. The cold months had come and the boys in his class had started talking about girls. At first Jimmy joined these conversations, because girls were great. He loved his friends and his sisters. Yes, some of the girls in his class were pretty, but lots of girls were pretty. Boys were too, but none of the other boys in his class seemed to think that.

Jimmy kept this thought with him throughout the first year of year seven, and it started to eat him up. He didn't think he was normal.

"What's up?" False asked.

He shrugged, kicking his feet into the dirt.

"You're moping." She told him. "Have been for a while."

"When you talk to the girls, what do they talk about?" He asked.

She walked alongside him, balancing on the curb of the pavement as

she did. “Celebrities, make-up, social media, boys. Where’s Gem?”

“Hairdressers,” Jimmy said, sitting down on the ground. “False, am I wired wrong?”

“Umm, dunno.” She sat next to him. “You’re going to have to explain more. I’m not good at reading minds.”

He stretched his legs onto the road. There was no traffic, it was a quiet street. “The boys want to talk about girls, and the girls want to talk about boys.”

False ran her fingers through her hair to stop it getting in her face. “Happens when you get older. What my Auntie said.”

“I don’t want to get older.” Jimmy picked up a leaf. It was brown and muddy.

She smiled sadly. “We can’t be young forever.”

“Stop sounding grown up.” He huffed.

“I think we grew up years ago, but we still pretend to be our ages to make everything feel better.” False got up after deciding the floor was too cold. She held her hand out to help Jimmy up. “Fancy a donut?”

“Yeah alright.” He sighed.

-

High school was great. The lessons were fun and Gem, Jimmy and False were still close. After confirming Lizzie was his sister, she started to come around a few times for dinner since she wanted to get to know her little brother.

Jimmy could safely say his life was busy, but he loved it like that. It meant he didn’t have to listen to his brain. His mind was always telling him weird stuff these days.

Pearl and Grian went to College; Pearl to study architecture and Grian to study Acting. He came home one day, grinning from ear to ear. “There’s this boy. He’s from America. He’s so funny.”

“I feel sorry for Mumbo.” Pearl added. “Having to deal with G and Scar.” It was a joke.

Grian laughed and playfully pushed her. “Hey! No, we are going to be

as equally as chaotic."

-

Life sped past and Jimmy didn't even notice. He was fourteen. How did that happen? Fourteen.

School had ended for the summer, and Jimmy came to False and Gem with lists of things they could do. "This summer is going to be so fun! We can go to the theatre, the cinema, and into town all by ourselves. That's exciting. Oh! We can go camping in the woods too!"

The girls sat there and listened to his ideas.

"Jimmy, I'm not getting up at three in the morning to watch the sunrise." Gem sighed. "And realistically, you aren't either."

He looked at his lists. "True." Jimmy crossed it off. "But we're going to have a fun summer, right?"

"Yep. Funnest there's ever been." False told him.

Jimmy grinned.

"Don't forget I'm going to London with Pearl next week." Gem said.

He had indeed forgotten about that. "Yeah, I think I told Martyn I'd come over then anyway."

False got off Gem's bed. "We have plenty of time to be together."

The three of them were looking forward to it.

Impulse had bought Gem a camera for her birthday, so the three of them told themselves they would take plenty of photographs of their summer.

They had the time of their lives.

Impulse and Xisuma hardly saw them in the day, but as long as they knew they were alright, they were ok with it.

The weeks went, July fell into August, and the end of August quickly crept up on them. It didn't matter too much. They were having fun.

Then one day, everything changed. They were at the park; no other children were there so Jimmy and False got the park to themselves.

Gem would've joined them, but she was in town with Pearl. The two had got closer as friends recently.

The young teens sat on the swings and talked. At some point they did a race to see how high they could get, which sent them both into buckets of laughter.

"When we get back to school, they're never going to believe what we've done." Jimmy let his swing slow down until it stopped. He took a swig of water from his bottle.

False's face fell. "Yeah. When we get back to school."

He noticed the change. "What's wrong."

She got off the swing. "I'm not, going back to school."

"Oh." Jimmy blinked. "Moving schools? That's alright, we'll just have to come around for tea. Gem and I can tell you the gossip."

False didn't look at him. The laugher had gone. "I'm moving house too."

"Where?" He asked. "Not too far, right?"

"My Auntie got a job in Scotland." False said.

Jimmy stopped. His heart stopped. The world around him, stopped. "When?"

"Tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" Tomorrow. "How long have you known?"

She finally looked at him. "Since June."

"You've known since June?" But that was months ago.

False took a breath. "I've got to go. My Auntie wants us to set off early."

It was as if Jimmy had been turned into a tree. Giant roots hooked him to the floor. He couldn't move. Couldn't speak.

"I wanted to tell you. But I knew you'd hurt." False looked towards the gate. "I'm so sorry Jimmy." She walked towards it. False walked out the gate and towards her street.

Jimmy couldn't move.

But. But. False was his best friend.

He had never been more alone.

-

Impulse heard the front door slam and running up the stairs. "Hi Jim!" he called up. That was strange. Jimmy wasn't a 'door slamming' person. "Jimmy?" Impulse put down his carrot and peeler and followed him upstairs. He knocked on Jimmy's door and came in. "Jimmy?" Jimmy was under the duvet. Impulse heard quiet sobs. He came to sit on the bed next to him. "What's wrong?"

Jimmy didn't answer. He couldn't stop. Everything was gone. This summer was a plaster that had been torn off and now the wound underneath was showing.

Impulse stayed with him.

-

At some point, Gem came home and found her dad and brother. "Jimmy?"

Impulse shrugged. "I don't know, Gem." He got up. "I think for now we should give him some time." They left the room and descended the stairs.

Gem didn't know what to do. She didn't remember the last time she'd heard Jimmy cry like that.

-

Around midnight, Jimmy came downstairs and told them. "False... False is gone."

"Gone where?" Gem asked.

"Scotland. We're never going to see her again." He whispered.

Impulse didn't know what to say. "You have her number, don't you?"

"Her aunt never let her have a phone." Gem answered for him.

-

Jimmy lay in the dark. The dark fed on his soul and his happiness. He lay on the floor, eyes red and sore. It was like someone had died.

On the first day back of school, he went but was like the ghost of what he once was. He didn't listen to the teachers, didn't do his work. He couldn't bring himself to care.

He didn't care when he got detention. Didn't care when his dads were called in for a meeting. Didn't care when the school offered him therapy or when the GP diagnosed him with depression. The days slipped away from his fingers. When did he last shower? When had he last eaten?

Gem sat with him every night. "Do you want to play a game?"

He shrugged.

"It's a new game called Decked Out."

"Fine." Jimmy muttered. It was like he was on autopilot.

-

Gem tried to be brave for the both of them.

-

Then one night, Impulse opened the door to the upstairs bathroom. He looked on the ground. "Oh my god! Gem call an ambulance!"

Chapter End Notes

(written a few hours after posting this chapter)

I've finished the last two chapter's and I am struggling to fight the urge to post them right now. Hehe. But guess we'll have to wait for tomorrow:)

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Family group chat

Jimmy: Can I stay over at anyone's?

Jimmy: Tango told me I should.

Dadsuma: You don't have to ask. How long do you need?

Jimmy: to what?

Dadsuma: To stay, to pack? I'll come and pick you up.

Jimmy: Tango says he's coming back, but I don't know when.

Jimmy: The Taxi's arriving soon to take him to the airport.

Jimmy: I hate goodbyes.

Dadsuma: I'll be over soon. Give me twenty minutes.

Jimmy: Ok. Why are you up so early?

Dadsuma: Had some business at the hospital.

Jimmy: You have a foster placement?

Dadsuma: No, I had one. Only for a few hours. Everything's alright now.

Jimmy: Ok. I'll pack some stuff.

Martyn: Hey Timmy, just off my shift. Need me to get the cats?

Grian: My turn to get the cats. I will fight you Martyn.

Martyn: Alright, alright.

Jimmy: Dude, why are you up so early?

Grian: Scar had ideas. He wanted to go over them.

Jimmy: Damn

Grian: Don't complain. It's your story line.

Jimmy: I'm not. Just saying Damn.

Grian: Dad, could you drop the cats at mine on the way??

Dadsuma: Will do. Did you get any sleep?

Grian: Which one of us?

Dadsuma: All?

Grian: No.

Martyn: Night shift dad.

Jimmy: Got an hour?

Dadsuma: Sleep. All of you.

Jimmy: Tango's Taxi is here.

-

Tango came up behind him and kissed his shoulder. "Time to go."

Jimmy put his phone away and leant back into him. "Dad's coming." He turned around in his arms and hugged him tight, not wanting to ever let go. "Tell me when you get home."

"I'll message you the second I do." Tango cupped his face and traced his features with his eyes, wanting to commit Jimmy's face to memory. Smiling, he leant in for a kiss. "See you later."

Jimmy was glad he hadn't said 'goodbye'. "See you." He let go of him. The taxi driver would get impatient otherwise. His heart pounded in his chest. Please don't let this be the last time he saw him.

Logically, he knew it wouldn't be but Jimmy's mind hardly stuck with logic. "Tango." He reached for his hand before he walked over the threshold.

Tango turned his head back.

"I love you." He whispered.

Tango smiled. “Love you too.” He took his suitcase and walked down the path to the taxi. The driver had got out to help him put his case in the boot.

Jimmy couldn’t help but stare. Tango climbed into the taxi and the car drove off, leaving Jimmy alone. The world suddenly felt too empty.

Luckily, Xisuma arrived not too long later and helped him pack his stuff up. They carried the cats into the car as well as Jimmy’s back. He locked up the house and got into the passenger seat of the car. “I miss him already.”

“You’ll see him soon.” X told him, starting the engine.

He nodded and put his seatbelt on. It was still dark, but the sun was slightly peeking up over the horizon, making the sky a deep red-purple colour. There were clouds, but not too many. Jimmy watched an airplane fly overhead. It was tiny. He got out his phone and searched it up on Flightradar. “That plane is going to New York.”

X had a quick look at the plane before pulling out into the street. “I’ve never been.”

“Me neither.” Jimmy put his phone away. “Could’ve. An American company wanted a part of Scar’s show, but he turned them down because Scar’s always liked the London feel. Although there might be a few scenes shot there at some point. Scar wants to see his brother.” He said.

Xisuma listened. It was too early to talk and drive, but he was interested to hear what Jimmy had to say.

They dropped the cats off and arrived home. Jimmy went to his room and tried to get some sleep.

September 2016

Jimmy woke up to rhythmic beeping and bright lights. Something was pressed tightly against his arms, and his sheets were unusual. Not at all what he was used to.

He opened his eyes the moment he remembered what had happened.

Oh.

He must’ve gone too far.

A medically clean smell reached his nose.

Hospital. He was in hospital. Oh god, everyone was going to be disappointed.

Jimmy sat up and looked around. The curtains were shut around his bed, so he assumed he was on a ward. Next to him, the chair remained empty of any person but instead held some bags.

The curtain opened slightly, and Xisuma stepped in. “Oh, Jimmy.” Relief washed over his face. He shut the curtain again and sat on the bed, taking his son’s hand. “How are you doing?”

Jimmy shrugged. He looked down at his arms and saw bandages on both.

“Hey,” X whispered. “No one’s mad.”

“Where’s Dad?” Jimmy asked.

Xisuma considered his words. “Taking a breather.”

He closed his eyes and lay back. “Oh.

“I think Gem’s around, finding some sandwiches.” X said.

“Gem?” Oh god, what had he done? What had he done to everyone?

Xisuma watched him for a moment. “Hungry?” He rubbed his thumb over the back of his hand.

Jimmy shook his head.

“Alright. Try to get some rest.” He kissed the top of his head but didn’t move from his spot, not wanting to leave Jimmy alone. “I’ll be here when you wake, and if I’m not, someone will be.”

Sleep sounded good. Not thinking about what had happened sounded good, and Jimmy did not want the details. He thought of nothing and focused on the beep of the heart monitor. Eventually, he dozed off.

Xisuma stayed as he said he was. Nurses and doctors came in from time to time to check on him, and left, hardly saying a word. Gem came in and sat in the hospital chair, scrolling on her phone, checking the weather and Tumblr and reading some stories on Fanfiction.net. She looked up over her phone. “Where’s dad?”

“Talking with someone, I think.” Xisuma told her.

Gem nodded and went back to reading. She chewed a little on her nails, a habit she thought she’d grown out of.

“Did you find sandwiches?”

Gem bent over and picked up the carrier bag she had brought with her, passing it to X. “There’s prawn, ham, chicken salad and cheese. Got some juice too. And chocolate.” She reached into her pocket and took out the change. “Here you go.”

“Thanks.” X took it and pocketed the change. He got out the cheese sandwich and opened the packet, taking one of the triangles out and taking a bite. “You not having one?”

“Later.” Gem didn’t look up from her phone. She was texting Pearl. “Pearl and G are coming after class.”

That was to be expected.

Martyn would likely come soon too. He had just started working as an A&E nurse. Luckily, he hadn’t been on the night shift when Jimmy had come in.

“Alright.” Xisuma put his sandwich on the bed and ran his hand over his face, trying to rub the sleep away, He hadn’t slept. No one had. Who could after what had just happened?

Gem put her phone down with a sigh. “How could they go to school after everything?”

Xisuma opened his eyes and glanced her way. “People have different ways of dealing with their emotions. If they needed to go to college today, then that’s ok.”

Gem nodded and thought for a moment. “Dad blames himself.”

X blamed himself too. “Feelings are complicated, sweetie.”

“I know.” Gem got herself comfy on the chair. “I think. I think I blame myself, for not seeing. Cus, I don’t know.” She moved her phone from one hand to the other. “Obviously when Falsie moved to Scotland...” Gem moved again.

“Gem, it’s ok.” X told her.

She shook her head. “But it’s not, because how didn’t we notice before it was too late?” Gem swallowed down the lump in her throat. “And, and we almost lost him, didn’t we? Dad didn’t say, but we did.”

Xisuma didn’t say anything, but he nodded. He turned his eyes back to Jimmy, noticing how pale he was.

“We can help him. It’ll be ok.” X said, almost unable to keep his voice from shaking. For a second, he forgot Gem was still just a child and needed comfort in all this. He opened his arm out for her.

Gem got up and accepted the hug. She gasped back tears. “Did, did False’s auntie message?”

X held his words. “She blocked me.”

She stepped back from the hug. “But dad doesn’t have her number.”

“I’m sorry Gem.”

“But that means we’ll never get to talk to False!” Gem turned and stormed out, pulling the curtain open with a slash, not closing it behind her.

Xisuma thought to follow her but figured he should stay there. Gem probably needed some space.

-

Time ticked.

Noon turned, and evening was just around the corner. There had been no sign of Impulse, and Xisuma wondered if he was beating himself up somewhere. He didn’t know where everyone else had gone. They came in and out, but Jimmy had been asleep all day.

For the thirtieth time, the blue curtain opened and closed. Jimmy had been awake long enough to get a few bites of prawn sandwich and a sip of orange juice. X turned to see who had come in, expecting it to be the nurse or Pearl or someone. But it wasn’t.

It was Scar. “Well, hello there.”

“Scar.” Jimmy smiled slightly. He hid arms under the sleeves of his hoodie.

Scar smiled a ‘hello’ at Xisuma, but kept his focus on Jimmy. “I have

some um, projects that you might be interested in once you're out of hospital."

Jimmy tilted his head.

"Been looking into some filming. Mumbo's decent with a camera, and I've decided to write some scripts." Scar said. "And I've heard you're into acting, so I wanted to ask if you wanted to join in with our acting projects."

"Would love to." It came out without hesitation. Jimmy put his bottle down beside him. "Thanks, Scar."

Scar beamed. "It was lovely doing business with you Jimmy." His phone buzzed in his pocket. "I should get going. Cleo want's me back soon."

"Thanks' for coming Scar." Xisuma told him. "Get back safe."

"Will do. Bye." Scar left. His voice was heard from the end of the ward. "Hi G, Jimmy's awake."

A few seconds later Grian rushed in. "Timmy!" He almost tripped over the bags on the floor to hug his younger brother. "Don't scare us like that again please."

Jimmy leant into the hug but sighed. "Sorry."

"No sorry's." Grian told him.

"But I did something wrong." Jimmy said, voice croaky from the lack of liquid all day, apart from the sips earlier. "I didn't mean to go that far. I promise I wasn't trying to go that far."

Grian held him closer. "I know."

Jimmy tried to hide more under his blankets. "Dad hates me. He hasn't been here."

Grian looked at Xisuma and X turned his phone off. "He'll be here." He'd texted him twenty minutes ago to say Jimmy had woken up.

-

X: Jimmy's awake

Impulse: I'll be there soon

X: How are you doing?

Impulse: I don't know X. I don't want him to see me in this mess.

X: I don't think he cares. He just wants you here.

Impulse: I need to at least appear that I'm calm

X: Come here before I drag you here.

X: Tell him you're not mad at him.

Impulse: I'm not mad at him. I'm mad at myself!

X: I get it. Get here now

Impulse: Aright! I'm coming

-

Yet, there had been no sign of him so far.

Jimmy sank lower into the bed. "He's not going to want me anymore."

"He's your dad." Grian told him.

"Our track record of adults leaving is very high." Jimmy huffed.

"Timmy, get out of your mind and breathe." There was desperation in his brother's voice.

Jimmy sat himself up. "I can't! Why do you think I did this in the first place!?"

Quiet

"Sorry."

Xisuma stood up. "Grian, where's Pearl?"

"With Gem in the canteen." Grian said, voice low. He yawned a little.

"Stay with Jim and text the girls to come up. I'm going to get Impulse, and then he can stay here for a few hours whilst I get you three home." X went around the other side and kissed Jimmy's head. He knew they'd be ok for a bit.

After leaving the ward, he asked around if anyone had seen Impulse. He was still in the hospital, he just didn't know where.

G texted Pearl and soon enough, the girls came up to see their brother. Martyn came in too. "Hi Tim."

"Martyn!"

-

X found Impulse outside, sitting on a bench and staring out at the carparks. A bus came by, stopped and went again. It didn't look like Impulse had moved for a while. "Have you eaten?"

"Have you?" Impulse didn't move.

"I have actually." X didn't sit. "Go and see Jimmy."

Impulse took a breath.

"Dude, have you been holding it in the whole time?" X asked him.

No movement.

Xisuma decided to sit. "No one's going to judge you for crying."

"Can't let the kids see." He said.

Another bus came by. A line of people waiting at the stop got on. "They're not going to see you hiding out here. You never know, you might feel better when you see Jimmy."

"How are you keeping it together?" Impulse asked.

"In a minute, I'm going to take the kids to mine, make some dinner and when they go to bed, I'll um, do what I need to do then." X sighed.

Quiet fell between them.

Xisuma decided to continue with the plan. "We get a few hours' sleep. I come back and you go home," He was interrupted.

"There's still blood on the bathroom floor." Impulse whispered.

Xisuma changed his words. "Then go to mine and get some kip. But right now, you're going to see Jimmy, because he wants to see you.

He needs you."

Impulse breathed his lungs full of September air and stood up. "Alright. You're right Xisuma."

They went back inside the hospital.

-

Jimmy listened to his family talk. There were so many of them, but their voices drowned out the thoughts in his head. His dads came through the curtain, and he relaxed.

Impulse came around and took his hand. "Sorry I wasn't here, Son. I promise I will be from now on."

So, he wasn't leaving.

Good.

"Dad, I miss False." He told him.

Something flickered over his dad's face, but Jimmy couldn't make it out. "I know."

"Timmy, Netty's working tonight so she'll be able to keep you company." Martyn told him from the chair.

Jimmy managed a smile.

Pearl passed Jimmy his bottle when it fell from the bed.

A nurse came in to get Jimmy's order for dinner and told them that visiting time was over. One parent was allowed with him since he was underage.

It came time for the goodbyes. Not really a goodbye. They'd see him tomorrow. Everyone left, except Impulse and of course, Jimmy.

"Dad, I'm sorry."

"For what, Jim?" Impulse asked him.

"For disappointing you."

Impulse looked through the bags and pulled out Norman and Woody. "No one's disappointed in you." He passed them over. "I should've

done more to help you.”

Jimmy held onto them and shrugged. “I kept it quiet.”

“Did you want to talk about it now?” Impulse asked him. “Might help?”

“It’s a bit crazy up there.” Jimmy pointed at his mind. “Just felt alone I suppose. I know I’m not alone. Just feel it.”

Impulse nodded a little. “Alright. Is therapy at school helping?”

“Not really.” Jimmy whispered.

He sat back in the chair. “We’ll look for someone better to help you.”

“Yeah.” Jimmy held Norman and Woody close. “Wish everything didn’t hurt so much.”

“I know.” Impulse said. “I will try and do everything in my power to take that hurt away.”

Jimmy rubbed his eyes. “Will it ever go away?”

“I.” Impulse couldn’t really answer that. “For some people, it does. But there are ways to make it bearable.”

He nodded. There wasn’t much else to say. Jimmy was just sorry it went this far. He had never meant it too.

Chapter End Notes

> I will be posting two chapters today. One now and the last one later on!

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

> The second chapter of the day, so don't miss out on chapter fifteen if you haven't seen it :)
>
> Also, bonus scene in the notes at the end.
> Thank you so much to everyone for reading and commenting.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tango: I’m home. Xx

-

Twitter was lively after the penultimate episode of Scar’s series. Fans were coming up with theories left, right and centre, drawing fanart and writing stories to accompany them. Jimmy had a good time giggling over the obscenest fan theories, but he retweeted them anyway.

-

TheHotGuyFanAccount

This theory made me laugh, lol. Hotguy should definitely have a giraffe pool inflatable.

-

SolidarityCanary

Decked Out three when?

-

DeckedOutOfficial quote tweeted your tweet.

-

Jimmy raised an eyebrow and clicked on the quote tweet.

-

DeckedOutOfficial

Soon. Very soon.

-

Jimmy clicked on the post so he could comment.

-

SolidarityCanary

Is that my Rancher???

DeckedOutOfficial

Answer your messages.

SolidarityCanary

Will do

-

Jimmy: Sorry, was scouting Twitter.

Tango: I saw

Jimmy: Glad you're home safe. Miss you

Tango: Miss you too. I have a meeting at work soon to work out a few things about relocating to London.

Tango: Well, setting up a London branch. So, I can keep working on DO3

Jimmy: Sounds fun.

Tango: I've just dropped Skizz off at his. If we're lucky, we could be back in a month. Get chance to find a place and things.

Jimmy: You can move in with me?

Tango: Reminder that we've known each other a few months

Jimmy: :(

Tango: Of course I will. Although still might get a flat in London. You could use it too for filming if you can't get home.

Jimmy: :)

Tango: Anyway, I should go. X

Jimmy: Love you :)

Tango: Love you too.

-

Jimmy set his phone down on the bedside table and looked up at the ceiling in his old room. There had been some good memories in this room. The first room he'd ever had. Decorating it over the years had been fun. Sleepovers with his friends. Making blanket dens with his siblings.

Night after night of Xisuma reading him bedtime stories before it was time for sleep. Yeah, lots of pleasant memories of the room.

Jimmy closed his eyes and let the nap wash over him.

-

Gem: Jimmy

Gem: Jim, answer your phone!

Gem: It's a crisis emergency.

Gem: False wants to meet up.

-

If Jimmy hadn't been awake before, he certainly was now.

-

Jimmy: She hasn't texted me!?

Gem: I have the better mental stability out of the both of us.

Jimmy: True.

Gem: Well? Do you want to?

Jimmy: I don't know

Jimmy: Not seen her in years

Gem: Well, I am. Just tell me so I can text her.

Jimmy: Yeah I want to see her.

Gem: Good.

Gem: Don't tell fam just yet.

Gem: Don't think they'd agree with this.

Jimmy: No. But it's not False's fault.

Gem: I knowww that. But do they know that?

Jimmy: They know but I don't think they listen.

Gem: Right. Well False wants to know if tomorrow is ok.

Jimmy: Tomorrow!?

Gem: So?

Jimmy: Yes!

Gem: No panic attacks?

Jimmy: Not so far. Can't promise there won't be tomorrow. :)

Gem: Ok. Meet me outside the coop near dads.

Jimmy: Got it. Time?

Gem: 10

Jimmy: AM?

Gem: No, False wants us to go for a midnight swim…

Jimmy: Yeah….

Jimmy: I'm tired.

Gem: Spending all night speaking with Tango?

Jimmy: I can't even say I'm not.

Gem: I see. Well go back to sleep.

Jimmy: I will

-

He didn't.

-

The next morning, after checking his phone, Jimmy got dressed in some light brown trousers and a comfy Halloween-inspired jumper. It had a ghost on it. One of those little cutely drawn ones that anyone would rather hug than be scared of. He combed his hair and went to put his boots on, not bothering to get anything for breakfast. Gem said they were meeting in a cafe. A nice neutral location.

He took the bus to the Coop near their dad's place and bought some snacks before walking down the street to the local cafe. They sat in the corner and waited a few moments before the bell tinkled, announcing a customer's arrival. Both Jimmy's and Gem's head turned sharp at the sound.

A young woman; blond hair down over her shoulders, wearing a blue coat. They both immediately knew it was False.

Once False spotted them, a look of recognition flickered over her face, and she came up to them. She paused before sitting. She didn't take her coat off like the other two had. "Hi."

"Hi." They said back.

Jimmy's leg bounced slightly under the table. "I'll go up and order. What do you both want?"

"Pumpkin spiced latte, please Jimmy." Gem smiled. "And some toast too please."

He got up and turned to False.

"Just some tea please." False said.

Jimmy nodded and walked to the counter. It was still within hearing distance.

Gem watched him go and looked back at her old friend. "How's your aunt?"

False shrugged. "I don't talk to her anymore."

“Oh, why?” Gem asked.

“Never worked out. I don’t think she ever wanted to look after me, which is fair.” False answered.

Jimmy came back and sat down. “So um, how’s things?”

“It’s been alright. Found some cool things to do down here, so I decided to move back.” False smiled slightly. “What about you two?”

“Been working as a freelance designer.” Gem offered. “Different things, like adverts and fashion and all sorts.”

Her smile widened. “That’s cool.” False glanced t Jimmy.

“Actor.” He kept his answer short.

Their drinks came quickly, and they sipped at their hot beverages as they caught up with life, however, they steered clear of one particular topic. Of False leaving. It was easy to pretend nothing had changed at all. That False had never moved.

Soon enough, they found themselves laughing at funny stories again. Like it used to be. They left the cafe once they’d finished and simply walked down the street, towards the park.

“So, what happened after I left?” False asked as they got to the gate.

“False.” Jimmy stopped, hand on the fence. “I don’t want to bring that up. Please.”

Her face grew serious. “But you went to hospital Jimmy.”

“I ended up fine.” Jimmy shrugged. “But it’s over now.”

“I was scared you’d died or something.” False sighed, giving up.

Gem broke the quiet. “He nearly did.”

“Gem!” Jimmy protested.

“She should know.” Gem leant back on the fence. “You left, and we missed you.” Her eyes stared intensely into False. “Don’t do it again.” They knew it wasn’t False’s fault. “I will fight your aunt if she makes you leave again.”

False nodded. “I just want to be friends again. I understand if you

don't."

Gem stared hard, thinking of every possibility. She looked at Jimmy and was able to read his face quite well. She pushed herself off the fence. "We shouldn't. This should be one of those things you let go and look back on, but I don't know about you Jimmy but, I miss our False."

A war played out in Jimmy's head. Did he? Did he allow himself this? "Alright. It might take time. This friendship will never be the same as it was when we were fourteen."

False nodded, though a smile spread on her face. A more genuine one. "Thank you for giving me another chance."

"Hug?" Gem suggested.

The three of them fell into a hug. Like the kind of hugs they did when they were younger.

"Race you to the end of the field." Gem whispered in their ears before running off to the other end of the field.

"Gem! That's cheating!" The other two ran after her, as if they were six years old again.

-

Jimmy sat in his dad's living room. Impulse was in the kitchen calling Skizz, and Jimmy so happened to be doing to same, but with Tango. The month had rolled by, and it was now almost Martyn's birthday.

"...And it was really fun."

"Glad you're reconnecting with her." Tango smiled. "Ah, finished." He muttered.

Jimmy picked up a cushion which had fallen onto the floor. "Finished what love?"

"You'll see when I see you."

"When are you seeing me?" Jimmy asked.

Tango grinned. "Soon love, soon."

"Before Christmas though?"

He nodded. “Way sooner than Christmas. I promise.”

Jimmy hummed in thought. “Could just ask Dad when Skizz is coming.”

“Impulse doesn’t even know that Skizz *is* coming back.” Tango laughed slightly. “I don’t think anyway.”

Jimmy’s mind got carried away with how soon ‘soon’ was and pictured the moment he got to see Tango again. He wondered what he’d get him for Christmas. And birthday too. That was in January.

September 2016

Once Jimmy was released from the hospital, he was given a few therapy options to attend to. He wasn’t allowed to go back to school for now so he could recover.

Impulse had hired someone to clean the bathroom for them, since he couldn’t stand to look at the sight of Jimmy’s blood covering the tiles. They got some strange looks from the cleaner, but he understood once he knew the context.

Scar came around frequently to talk about his acting projects with Jimmy and Grian. They held little meetings in the kitchen of Xisuma’s house and read-through scrips and everything. “I should make a superhero show.” Scar announced to the two of them.

“Sounds good, as long as I get to be your sidekick.” Grian joked, who had no such desires to be in a superhero film.

“You’ll see, G.” Scar grinned. “I’ll make a superhero out of you yet!”

Jimmy was just happy to be there. It kept his mind off everything. Stopped him from feeling delicate.

He wasn’t delicate. Really, he knew that, but sometimes Jimmy thought he was getting looks from people. The neighbours, or random people who had heard the news.

-

A few weeks into Jimmy’s recovery, Xisuma called for a family dinner. They hadn’t had a big one in a while, and he’d ordered too many

potatoes in the last shop.

Everyone was there. His dads, Xisuma and Impulse. His sisters, Gem, Pearl and Lizzie, and his brothers, Martyn and Grian.

It would be ok right? He had everyone here. He'd be ok.

"G, stop flicking peas at your brother," X told him. "You're an adult."

He grinned, like he wasn't an adult. "Sorry, dad."

Jimmy playfully kicked him under the table as payback, unable to keep back the giggles.

"You should've seen what happened at school today Jim." Lizzie said.

Gem gasped. "Oh yeah! Mr Morris and Mr Colon had a fight in the hall!"

"Oh I remember them!" Pearl smiled.

"Did Mr Morris finally find out Mr Colon was married?" Martyn asked.

Lizzie nodded, stuffing a potato in her mouth. "The police was called and everything."

Jimmy's eyes widened. "Mr Morris and Mr Colon were together?"

"Have been for years." Martyn said.

Jimmy ate some peas.

Grian stood up. "I'm going to be late for rehearsal."

"Oh yeah! Have fun!" X smiled.

He went to the door. "Ohhh forgot to tell you all. I have a boyfriend." He left.

November 2025

"Tango! My love!" Jimmy flung himself into his arms. "You're back."

Tango strongly wrapped his arms around him. “I’m here.”

“Home?” Jimmy asked him, closing his eyes and relaxing in the warmth of his body.

“I’m home.” Tango smiled. “Skizz should be surprising your dad in a bit.”

Jimmy smiled. “Dad’s going to be so happy.” He pulled away from the hug slightly. “Can I see the thing you were working on?”

“Mm suppose.” He dropped his rucksack on the floor and opened it up, putting out a rolled bit of paper, secured in bubble wrap. “I wanted to make something proper. Not just a sketch.”

Jimmy unwrapped it and beamed when he saw it. “It’s us.”

Tango nodded. “Us. No characters. Not fanart. Just us.”

“I love it.” He bounced a little on the balls of his feet. “I love it so much.”

Tango smile softened as he watched Jimmy’s face, loving the way the sun was hitting him through the door. Like a golden glow. “Want to go on a walk?”

Jimmy nodded and went to get his shoes on. He helped Tango bring his things in; there were a lot and locked the door behind them. Their hands found each other and their fingers entwined. Jimmy put his other hand in his pocket as they set off down the path. “We could go to the fields? Sun’s pretty this time of year.”

“Could argue that you are prettier.” Tango said.

Jimmy blushed slightly. “Smooth.”

“I do my best.” Tango smiled.

They strolled down to the fields. Nothing was in the way of the setting sun now. There were some dark rain clouds about and the golden sunlight made them look thunderous. Some crows cawed from some nearby trees and the wind whipped around them. It was chilly, but neither minded.

Perhaps Tango minded slightly more, having just come from Arizona.

It was magical in a way.

Jimmy tore his eye from the view and looked at Tango. His eyes shone like fire in the sun. Jimmy bent down a little to kiss his cheek. “I think, everything was worth it.”

“Mm?” Tango hummed in question.

“Everything that happened was worth everything I got out of it.” Jimmy said.

Tango leant into him slightly. “Yeah?”

“It’ll be worth it even more once Decked Out Three is out.”

Tango laughed. “I’ll have it out soon.”

Happy, Jimmy looked back over the field. The sun dipped below the tree line, but neither of them made to move. Both were perfectly content just where they were.

Chapter End Notes

> The family sat gathered around in Xisuma’s living room, every pillow and blanket in the house was taken. There were bowls of snacks on the coffee table, and everyone had a drink.
>
> Hot guy's theme tune played out, and the title screen appeared. It started with the sound of suitcase wheels on the floor and two sets of feet walking down the hallway. The camera panned up to show their faces.
>
> Hermes gasped. “That’s Uncle Jimmy and Uncle G!”
>
> Tango grinned and kissed Jimmy’s cheek.
>
> The scene carried on. Scar appeared onscreen and soon the characters were introduced.
>
> Back in the room, Jimmy peered towards Scar and saw him beam, watching his work unfold. His eyes fixed back on the screen as he leant into Tango's side.
>
> The show continued.

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